

ELEMENTARY **STRIKING**

STRATEGIES FOR BOXING, KICKBOXING AND MMA



★★★ **JACK SLACK** ★★★

Elementary Striking

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Dedications

Elementary Striking



To Rosie,

My first karate teacher, whose patience and understanding allowed me to pursue my own style and preferences without the inhibitions of dogma which are so common in the martial arts world.

Every time I land the cheat punch or a foot sweep on a sparring partner anywhere in the world I remember learning them as a hopeless 10 year old green belt, driving you to frustration.

I would never have been able to pursue the path that I have, imposing rationality onto the chaos of fighting, if not for your wisdom, tolerance and your insistence on my practising fundamentals when I was too impatient to care for them.

To Everyone I've Ever Trained With,

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to every single one of you. Whether I've loved working and sparring with you, or hated the thought of it, every last one of you has made me learn and be happier for it.

A Note on Photographs

Once again I must offer my sincerest thanks to the two young men who posed for the photographs in this book. Clearly the many hours they endured my shouting from behind the camera in the making of my first book didn't convince them of how difficult I am to work with! I hope their daft enough to come back again for my next book!

The photographs in this book are used for illustrative purposes but obviously to save on file size and expense there is a limit on what I have used photographs to demonstrate. The true heart of this book is in the strategies outlined in words – the photographs only serve to support these and you should never think that there's only one way to apply a strategy. There are dozens of ways to apply even the same basic combinations – and experimentation is half of the fun!

Preamble



The Purpose of Elementary Striking

This book began as an answer to many of the questions I have received since I began writing about my experiences and giving analysis of professional fights at my blog, www.FightsGoneBy.com, and at the major combat sports site, Bloody Elbow. I am by no means the best coach in the world (I hope one day I will be, but that's another story), but all of the techniques and strategies laid out in this book have been taught to me, practised and utilized in gyms and dojos around the world during my travels. Initially I responded to all of the questions I received, but over time there became far too many, and many of the same problems came up again and again. That was when I decided that it was time to write a book outlining what I consider to be the basic principles of fighting.

While this book will have sections on the mechanics of movements for the absolute beginner, I do not want anyone to think that this is just another book that breaks down the individual strikes and nothing else. One of the major aims of Elementary Striking is to give a series of techniques and strategies based in science and rationality, which will allow the novice striker to begin closing the gap that more advanced strikers will have built with experience and through trial and error.

Elementary Striking is divided into three parts; Fundamentals, Intangibles and Strategies. Fundamentals outlines the basic mechanics involved in throwing each strike. Some techniques are treated in more detail than others, and this should reflect their importance – for example the jab will receive a great deal of attention, while the right hook will receive less. The second part, Intangibles, focuses on those techniques which aren't really taught in gyms but rather learned through hours of sparring – I feel that laying them out in print will speed up the process of learning them, but you shouldn't expect to be using them to full effect right away.

Elementary Striking

The third part, Strategies, forms the meat of this book. I believe, and have experienced enough success sparring with more athletic opponents to convince myself entirely, that with a good strategy one can outstrike much stronger, faster, sharper opponents. If you just so happen to be the strongest and fastest striker in your gym, I promise you that the strategies laid out herein will take you head and shoulders above most people that you meet. Many physically gifted individuals fall into the trap of relying on their speed or power, and further down the road they find that once they have lost a step on either of these fronts they can no longer compete.

The strategies in this book are not based around strength, speed and durability – but on timing, anticipation and footwork. Almost every strategy in this book works to take away some of your opponent's weapons (by covering them, or circling away from them) and placing you in position to counter those that remain. This is scientific striking, not simply walking toward the opponent and spamming combinations, hoping to get hit less than the opponent.

Defining 'Striking'

Striking is the act of impacting one object with another. In the martial arts and combat sports context, striking is any technique that requires impacting the opponent's body with one's own body to cause the opponent injury or pain. The art of striking is to land strikes on the opponent while avoiding getting struck oneself. This more than anything else should be the focus of your striking training, and must be kept in mind at all times. Winning exchanges is not the aim of striking; striking should be treated as a hunt, not a fight. Look for opportunities to hit your opponent where he will have little or no chance to strike back.

The Pattern of Offence

There are a great many principles to learn in order to excel in the striking martial arts, but chief amongst them is what I term “The Pattern of Offence.” If you understand that the goal of effective striking is to hit while not being hit, you will also understand that your job does not end once you have landed your intended strike or combination. In this book you will learn the fundamentals of fighting technique and strategy, but you will notice that not a great deal of time is spent on covering up or countering attacks off of blocks. This is because it is not congruent with the style of striking which I personally find to be safest and most efficient.

To become a truly proficient striker one must be actively offensive, while placing oneself in positions to avoid the opponent's strikes. To accomplish this, adhere to the pattern of offence, which describes 3 stages that must be completed with each exchange: pre-entry, entry and exit. Pre-entry is moving into the opponent's striking distance, by using footwork to close them down or draw them in. Entry is clearing a path for your attack, both to aid in finding your target, and to prevent the opponent from landing effectively while you are within their range. This can be accomplished through feinting, hand trapping, off-balancing the opponent with a leg sweep or kick, or taking an angle. Exit is the act of getting out of range again safely after landing or missing one's attack.

The Fundamentals



Stance

Stance is the most important element of stand-up fighting, though it is also one of the most overstated. Watching an elite level fighter such as Willie Pep or Anderson Silva, you will notice that neither man moves laterally in his stance, instead opting to bring their feet level in order to side step more rapidly. This freedom of movement outside of any particular stance is the embodiment of Miyamoto Musashi's principle of "stance-no-stance". When either man engaged, however, they did so in a strong stance as it is the only way to hit with power and to maintain one's balance when the opponent strikes back. It is of paramount importance that before you begin playing with in-and-out movement, you learn the ins and outs of basic stance.

To assume a basic stance simply stand with your feet level, shoulder width apart, then take a comfortable step forward with your weaker-side foot, and turn your hips to a half facing position. Of course this is only a simple trick taught to beginners, and it is better to build your stance upon basic principles; this is not a karate class and the aim is not to fatigue yourself in your basic position. When building your stance here are some points to bear in mind:

Important Points

- Keep flex in both legs – for driving off of and to protect against injury when kicked.
- Initially, attempt to keep weight distribution even – you will inevitably drift towards one leg or the other depending upon your strategy and preferred techniques.
- Attempt to avoid standing too square on. Many Muay Thai students stand very square and consequently struggle against good punchers.
- Be able to brace against roundhouse attacks – standing with the feet in line is a big technical taboo.

Elementary Striking



Black stands with flex in both legs and his weight central. He can push off of his left or right leg to move in all possible directions and to generate power on his strikes.

Guard

There are two types of guard that I have come to appreciate and teach in ordinary encounters. While amendments may and should be made against opponents who are exceptionally gifted in one area of the striking game, these two guards should carry you through most encounters safely. The first guard is the upright guard which is to be adopted at the start of any sparring session or engagement as a point of good practice. This upright guard – in which the hands are held high and the body is erect, with the forearms ready to stop roundhouse kicks and swings – is an excellent base from which reconnaissance can be performed on the opponent. If he shows excellent kicks and willingness to use them, it is a good idea to stay in the upright stance – the equal distribution of weight and the upright posture ensure that it is the best stance from which to check kicks, as either leg may be lifted with ease and the body may be braced against strikes from both sides. If you find yourself more attracted to the kicking game, or will need to check kicks regularly, your preference will likely be to this stance. If you prefer power punching, as I do, then you will likely only wish to use this guard against exceptionally hard or fast kickers.

Elementary Striking



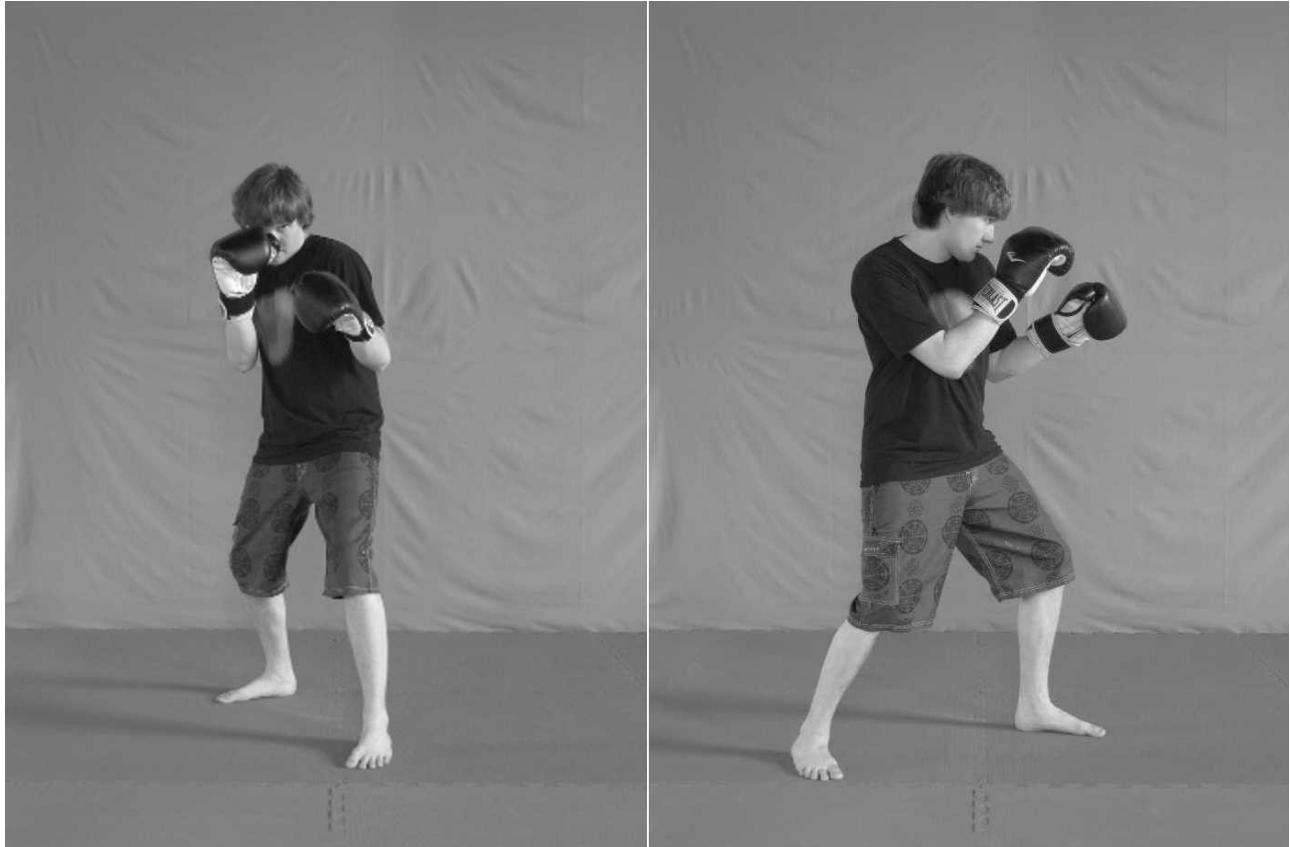
Black draws his hands up, resting his elbows against his ribs to prevent his arms from becoming prematurely fatigued. Black can touch his right thumb to his right ear at any time, indicating that it is in good position to block hooks and parry jabs.

Blackburn Crouch

The second guard which I advise learning is the Blackburn crouch. This is the stance that Jack Blackburn taught to Sugar Ray Robinson and Joe Louis, and which was responsible in no small part for their success. Boxing ideals of stance have changed greatly over the years – from the backfoot stances of Jack Johnson and Joe Gans, to the forward lean of Roy Jones Jr., but this one still holds great merit and rapidly pays dividends with correct practice.

To assume the Blackburn crouch, ensure that your hips are turned halfway back (or *hanmi* in karate circles), and bend straight forward at the waist so that your head is taken off of the centre line – this will force your opponent to punch across himself if he wants to hit you with his right hand – making a longer, slower path and effectively meaning you only have to deal with the immediate threat of his lead hand. Open your right hand and place it in front of your chin or right beside it, ready to catch or parry the opponent's jab. The left hand can be lowered a little to add power to the jab because of the added distance and awkward path that the opponent's right hand will be forced to travel and the ease with which it can be ducked. A dip at the waist and legs, or hiding behind the lead shoulder, are both legitimate defences against the opponent's right hand from here. The Blackburn crouch affords greater opportunity to fight behind the jab and counter jab, as any good puncher should.

Elementary Striking



Black keeps his weight over his back leg and dips his head off line to his right. Because his head is further away from his opponent's right hand, Black can drop his lead hand a little to add power to his strikes. Black's right hand is forward – ready to smother his opponent's lead hand offence.

Footwork

Mobility is hugely important to a fighter – both forward and backward movements as in a fencing match, and lateral movements. Every stance has holes, and standing still simply gives the opponent more chance to exploit them. Correct movement is the most important line of defence – and fighters such as Lyoto Machida, Willie Pep and Anderson Silva have crafted careers as defensive geniuses without spending much time blocking punches at all. Willie Pep's famous line “He who hits and runs away, lives to fight another day” should be taken as a training maxim for anyone who hopes to avoid becoming a flat-footed brawler.

Shuffling

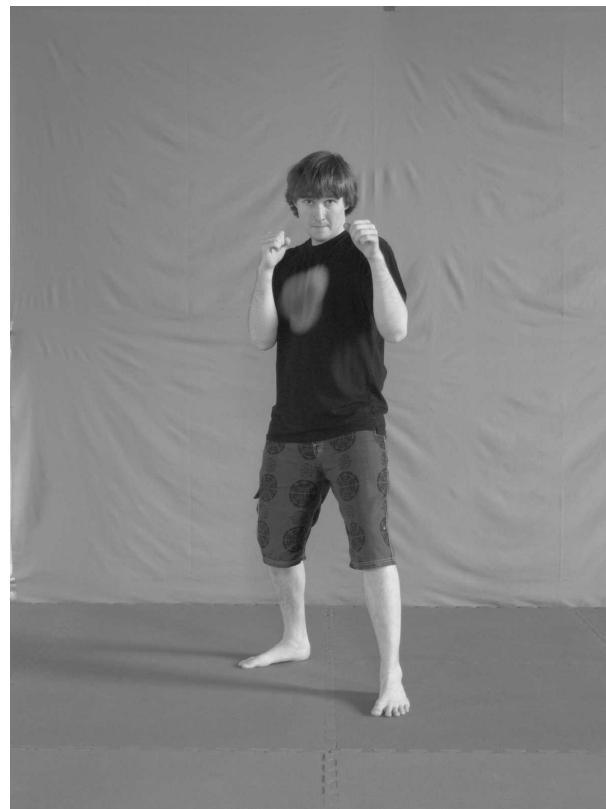
The most basic footwork patterns are the shuffles. To shuffle forward from your stance, lift the front foot slightly (a sheet of paper's thickness from the floor) and place it half a foot in front of where it began. Then simply bring the back foot up an equal distance and re-establish your base. At any point in the movement it is possible to strike, defend, or counter-strike. Shuffles should not be explosive movements but gradual, continuous, pressuring ones. The idea of the shuffle is to walk the opponent down until they are forced to throw a poorly considered strike, which the shuffler will always be in position to counter. Joe Louis was a master at this and I recommend watching all of the footage available of the man on Youtube.

To perform a shuffle backward, simply reverse the procedure. The rear foot glides back half a foot, the lead foot follows. The rear shuffle is useful when trying to bait an opponent into striking so that you may counter. Remember to be in position to duck or parry and fire back at all times. This is a big ask of anyone, but it is only through practising these awkward, mid-step engagements that one can consistently come out on top.

Lateral Movement

Lateral movement is enormously important because it: 1) makes it difficult for the opponent to hit you, 2) forces the opponent to react or risk being hit from a dominant angle, 3) discourages the opponent from punching, for fear of missing and conceding an angle. The most basic lateral movement is accomplished by stepping first with the outside foot (in the direction of movement) then the trailing foot.

Elementary Striking



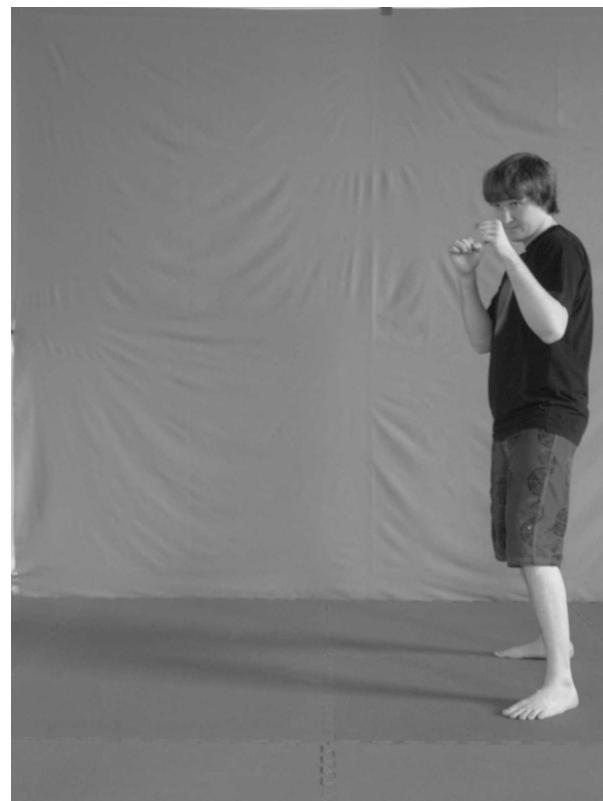
Black stands in guard.

Elementary Striking



To move to his left, Black leads with his left leg.

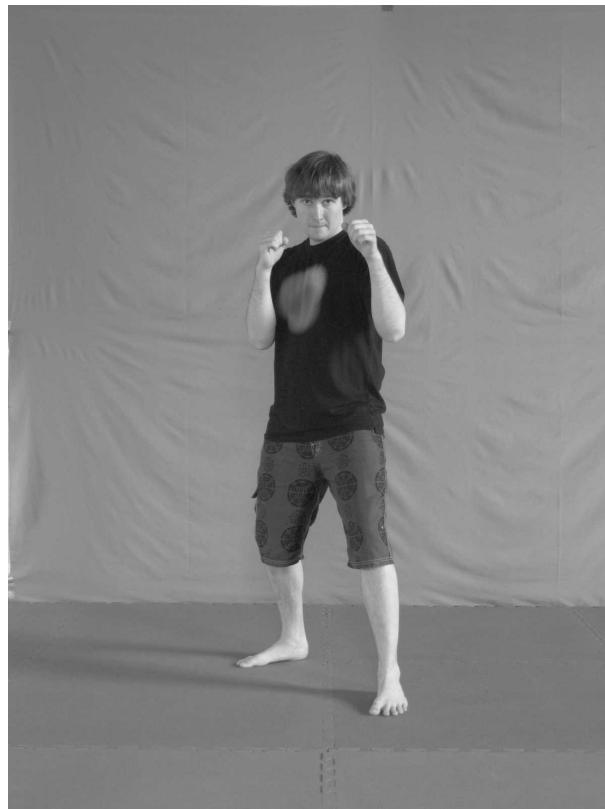
Elementary Striking



Then draws his right leg up. Notice how Black has pivoted to face where his opponent would be standing. Rarely in a fight do you ever move only sideways – it is normally combined with a turn to face the opponent in their new position.

Elementary Striking

Moving to the Right



Black starts in stance.

Elementary Striking

Elementary Striking



To move to his right, Black steps first with his right foot.

Elementary Striking



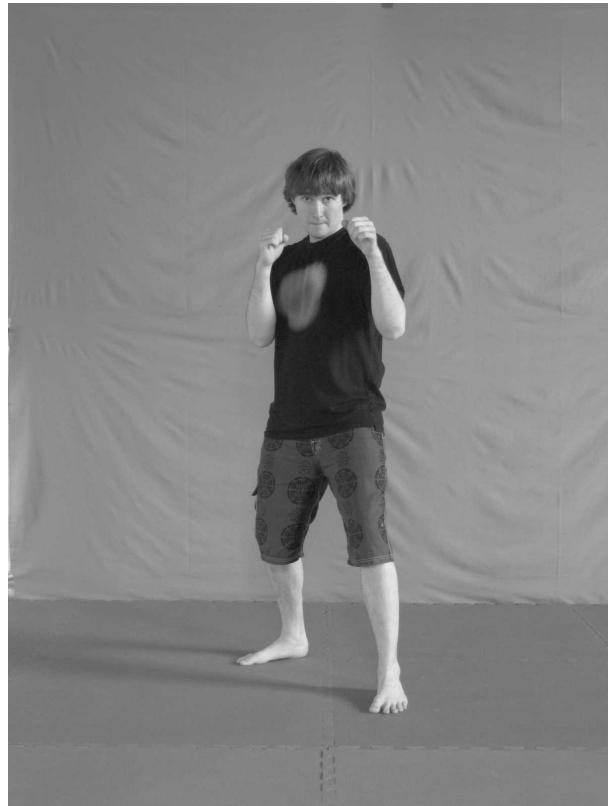
Elementary Striking

Then draws his left foot up, making sure to keep his left foot forward of his right in order to maintain his stance.

Classical Sidestep

This technique comes from the golden days of boxing. The classical sidestep is a more sophisticated method of lateral movement towards a fighter's own power hand. To accomplish this technique, step forty-five degrees forward and towards your power side, then draw the other foot up into a stance. This technique is excellent for sidestepping forward rushes by an opponent.

Elementary Striking



Black starts in stance.

Elementary Striking



Black makes a deep lunge with his right foot to his right side – turning his hips into the movement so that he is almost ready to being running at 45 degrees to his right. Notice how Black leans so that his head is far away from his opponent's right hand – allowing him to drop his lead hand. Black keeps his rear hand elevated so that he doesn't walk into a hook.

Elementary Striking



Black draws his right foot up into his stance.

Forward Burst

A useful technique for covering ground and surprising the opponent. Bring the rear foot up just behind the front foot, and then drive off of the rear foot into a stance well forward of where you began. Combined with a punching flurry this is a very dangerous and surprising offensive technique.

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Black begins in stance, wanting to cover a great deal of distance.

Elementary Striking



Black draws his back foot up, bending his legs so that a change in height doesn't give away his intentions and position. Coming up as you draw your back foot under you will cause opponents to retreat, expecting a charge or lead leg kick.

Elementary Striking



Black drives into the ground with his back foot and extends into a long stance.

Elementary Striking

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The right straight is an excellent technique to deliver as your lead foot lands, but others work just as well.

Backward Burst

For rapidly retreating there are few better techniques than this. Bring the front foot back and explode off of it into a stance well backward of where you began.

Elementary Striking



Black begins in stance.

Elementary Striking



Black draws his lead foot back under him.

Elementary Striking

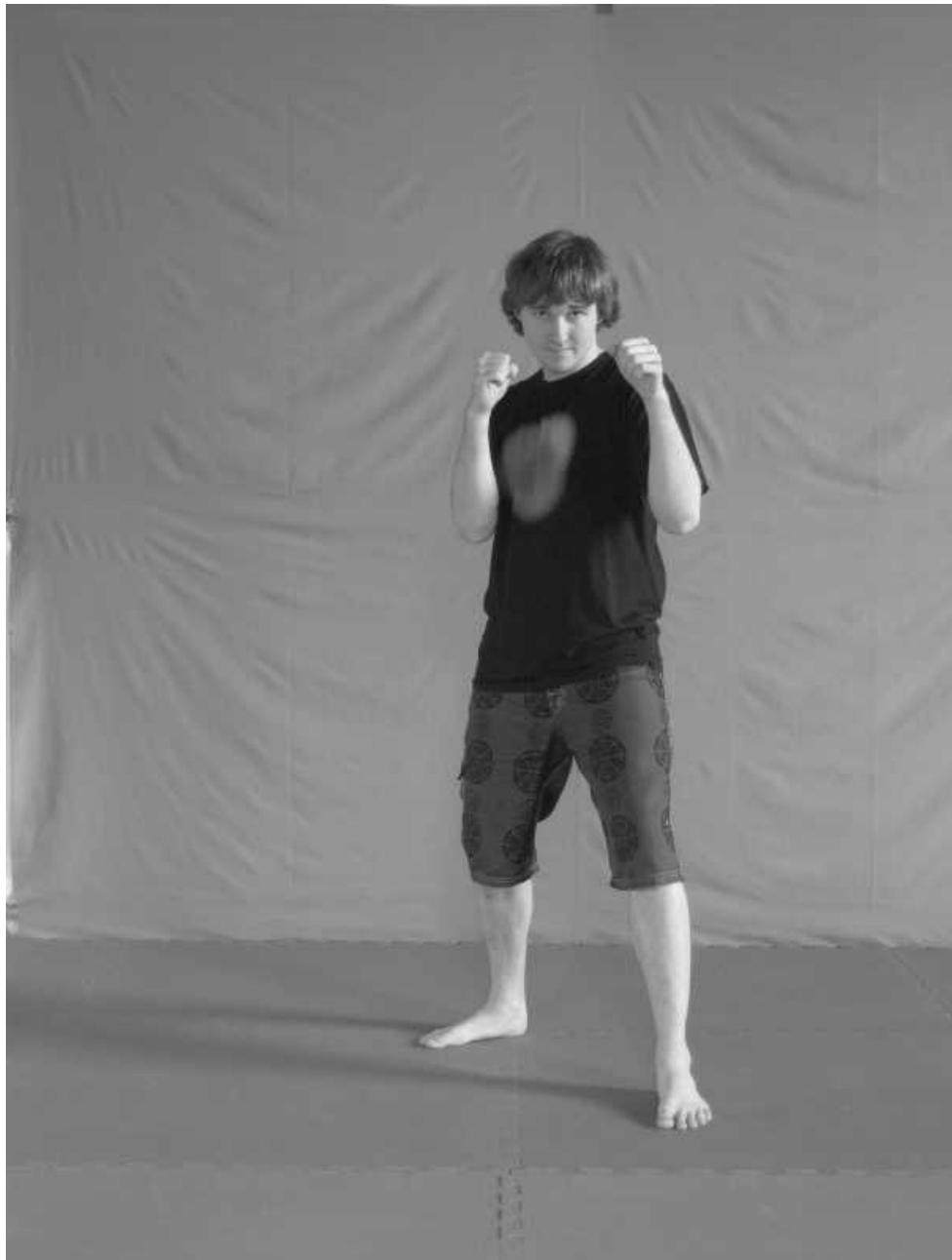


Black drives his rear foot back. This can also be combined with a right straight.

Stance Switching

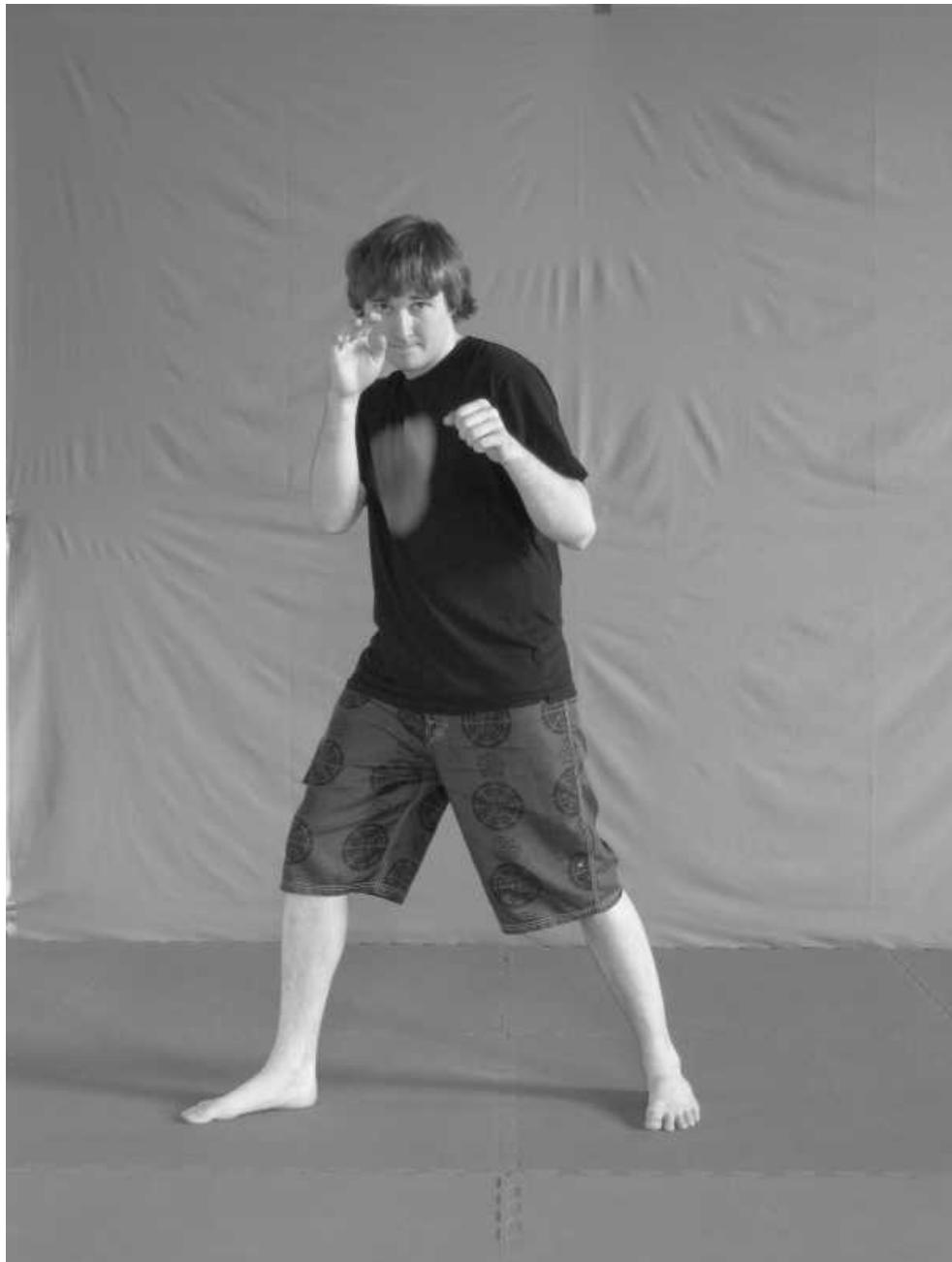
Of great importance to my personal striking philosophy, and finding great success in K-1 and MMA, is the ability to change stances smoothly and safely. Whenever changing stances, it is important not to change stance on the spot but to sidestep to the opponent's lead side. This takes away most of the opponent's strikes as you switch, reducing your vulnerability.

Elementary Striking



Black starts in stance.

Elementary Striking



Black initiates a Classical Side Step.

Elementary Striking



Rather than drawing the left foot up in front of the right, Black pivots on the ball of his right foot and brings his left foot in behind him. This places him in a southpaw stance.

Blocks and Parries

Blocks and parries are not the ideal way to avoid strikes. In truth, because blocking requires the defender to react to his opponent, he is at a disadvantage. The most effective method of defence against almost all offensive techniques is the use of footwork to evade the opponent by circling away or simply stepping outside of their reach. That said, there are many circumstances where blocking is the most appropriate exercise.

To block roundhouse strikes or kicks it is advisable not to attempt to block on your gloves. It is poor practice for MMA (where gloves afford little protection) or a self-defence encounter, and some force will also be transferred through the gloves on most occasions. Instead it is a good habit to learn that blocking should be done with the forearms, either by raising the bent arm to your ear, or by placing your palm to the side of your head and creating a wedge which roundhouse punches and kicks will ride up. The second method is very structurally sound and therefore absorbs the hardest impacts, but takes some learning to use effectively without punches and kicks slipping through.

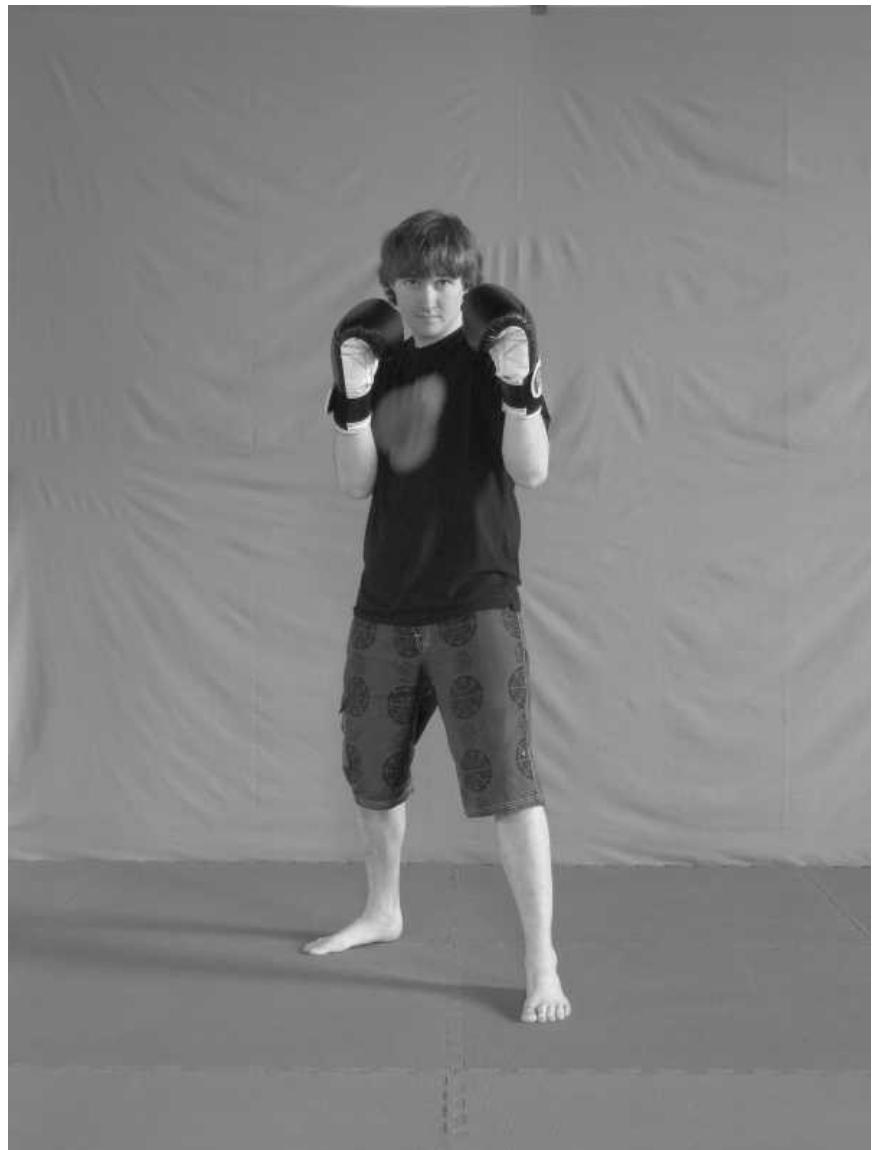
Parrying Straights

A skill that a fighter should learn early in his or her striking career is the parrying of straight blows. This is first day stuff, but still many top level fighters struggle when put under fire from fast, hard straight punches. Carrying your hands slightly in front of your shoulders and tucking your chin should force your opponent to attempt jabs and straights between your hands.

When parrying a straight, the hand which is on the outside of the attack (that is, the elbow side of the opponent's punch) should parry the blow *across the opponent's body*, making it difficult for him to follow up. If you block from the inside (i.e. blocking his jab with your lead hand, across your own body) you place yourself in danger of being hit hard and easily by the opponent's free hand.

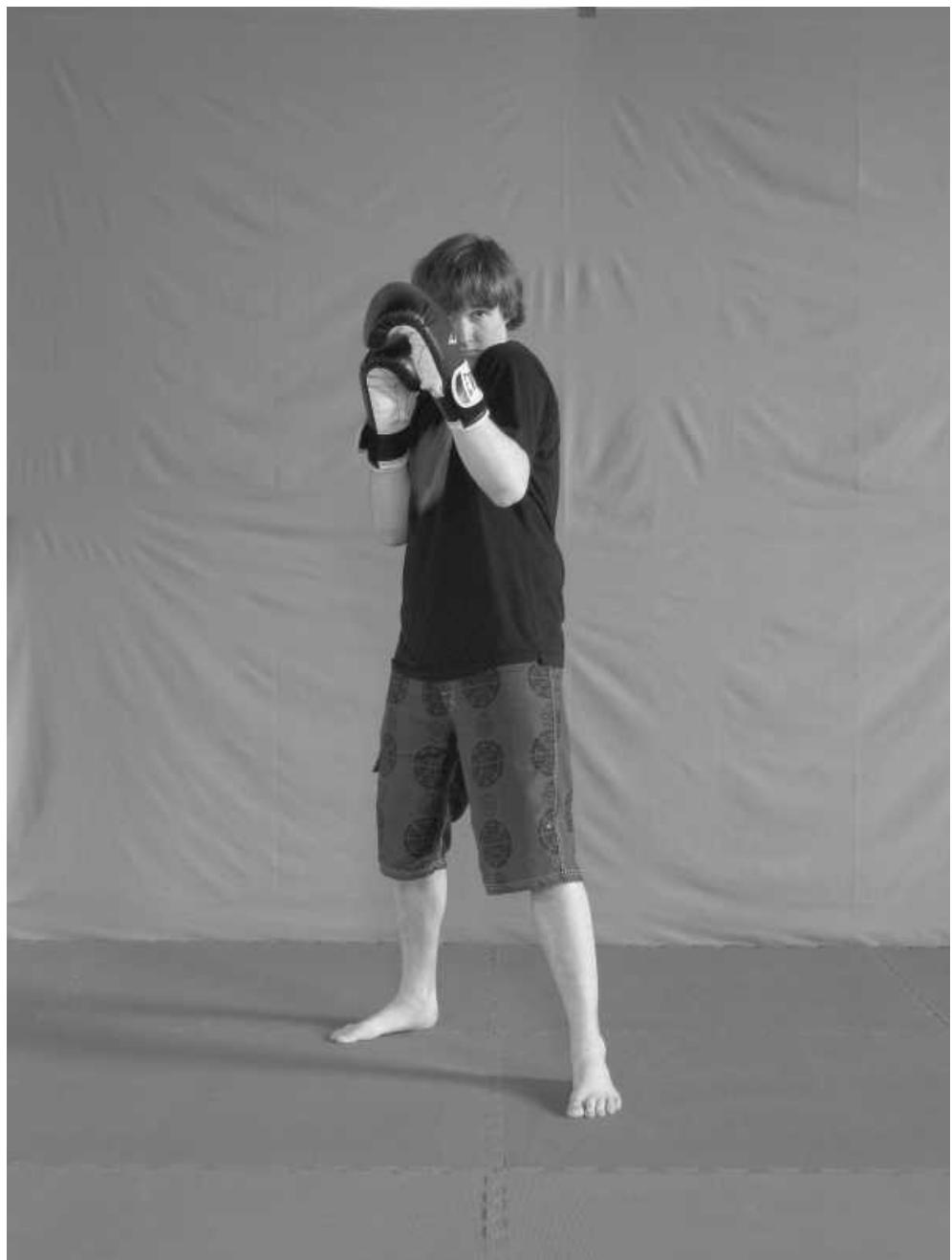
Straights to the body are a little different. Using the portion of the forearm nearest to the elbow, twist the body – keeping the hands up where they should be – and push your opponent's straights across his body to hinder his punching ability and open up countering opportunities.

Elementary Striking



Black stands in guard, ensuring that his gloves are outside of the path a straight punch would take to reach his head.

Elementary Striking



To parry a right straight requires only a brushing motion with the left hand across the body. Do not take the motion too far as you want to be able to counter quickly.

Elementary Striking



Notice that White parries only so far as to take Black's right straight past its target. Notice also that White's parry forces Black to punch across himself, hindering a follow up punch.

Elementary Striking



To parry the jab, the same action is made with the right hand. The parry may be performed with just the hand, or against a strong jabber may use the hips as Black does here.

Elementary Striking



Notice that White is in perfect position to jab back at Black without fear of getting beaten to the punch by Black's right hand. This is an excellent basic counter that everyone should learn.

Blocking Roundhouse Blows

To block a hook or roundhouse kick, raise your hand so that the heel of your palm is braced against the top of your head. This will make an angle up which the hook or kick will ride. In the case of a roundhouse kick, this will often result in the kick riding over your head and the opponent being badly out of position to defend your counter.

To defend roundhouse strikes to the body, simply keep the elbows in. Against a hard kicker it is often a good idea to turn into the kick and take it across both forearms.

It may seem counter intuitive to brace your hand against your head when blocking a blow, but a quick experimentation process with both this and the modern boxing cover up will reveal why it is best to brace, because the arms can take some force then without simply being punched through or knocked back and forth into your own head.

Elementary Striking



To block a right overhand or roundhouse blow to the head, simply raise the left hand and brace the palm against your skull. Black is pointing his elbow outward and holds it high to ensure an incline which blows will ride over. This block will diminish the power of strikes that connect against it, and serve to damage the hands and shins of an opponent should they recklessly kick your elbow.

Elementary Striking



Here White catches an overhand punch with his forearm and his arm is well braced against the top of his head.

Elementary Striking



To block a left hook or roundhouse blow simply perform the same movement with your right hand and turn your right hip inward.

Elementary Striking



Here White blocks Black's left hook.

Checking a Kick

Low kicks, dug into the muscle of the thigh, are one of the most damaging strikes you will face when you begin training in striking. One way to deal with low kicks is to learn to take them – which is simply a process of toughening your thighs and will come with experience and time. To begin with, however, it is worth investing the time in learning to check. To check a kick simply lift the leg that is being attacked and point the front of the shinbone outward. This will cause a shin to shin collision which is unpleasant for both parties. A better way to check the kick is to attempt to take it on the very top of the shin bone, or even the knee cap itself. This can often lead to a broken or fractured shin for your opponent, and at the very least act as a deterrent against kicking again.

Elementary Striking



To check a right low kick simply lift the left leg to catch it with the shin. In training it is best to lift the leg high and block with the lower portion of the shin for safety; in a match it is best to block high on the shin near the knee cap as this will damage the kicker most. Here White is being kind to Black by blocking very low on his shin.

Elementary Striking



To check a left kick is as simple as lifting the right leg in the same way you lifted the left. Remember to point your toes outward so that you are catching the kick on the front of your shin and not the tender outside portion.

Punches

Straights

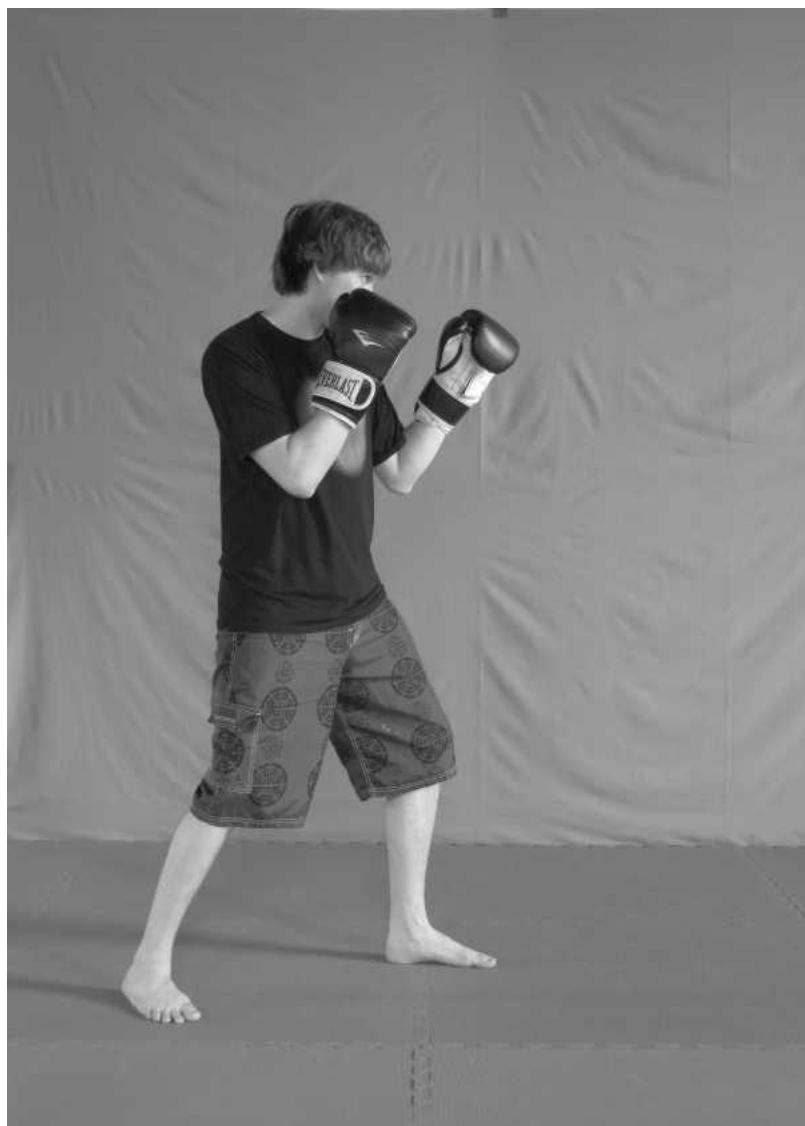
The straights are the building blocks of good striking, and the popularity of the straight blow largely did away with the swinging method of punching used in antiquity. The two types of straight are the jab and the rear straight (the rear straight is sometimes called the cross, but we will learn the true cross later). The jab is thrown by taking a step forward with the lead foot out of your stance, turning your left hip and shoulder forward, and driving your left fist straight out towards your opponents head. It is important to ensure that the lead shoulder is shrugged, and that the head is taken offline towards your rear side. The rear hand should remain high, either in front of the face to catch a simultaneous jab, or with the forearm elevated to defend against a left hook or high kick.

The right straight is thrown in a similar way but, because it travels from farther away, is marginally slower and easier to see coming. On the other hand, it is largely unexpected that you will lead with this technique, so the telegraphing can be traded off for its unexpectedness as a “sucker punch”. Most of the time, however, it is wise to set this technique up with a jab or left hook. Drive off of the ball of the back foot, rotate the hips so that the right shoulder flies forward, then drive the fist to its target as linearly as possible. Make sure to raise the right shoulder and keep the chin tucked as you throw the punch.

Important points

- Eliminate unnecessary hand and shoulder movements before throwing your straight. Split seconds are everything with straight punches.
- Practice combining the jab and the right straight in what is known as the 1 – 2. Then add an extra jab and practice the 1 – 2 – 1. This is an excellent basic combination to enter, hurt the opponent, and exit without him following you.
- Make sure the punching shoulder is always elevated over the chin and the non-punching hand is in position to stop a counter.

Elementary Striking



Black stands in stance.

Elementary Striking



Black drives off of his back leg, stepping his lead foot forward and dropping his weight slightly. As his lead shoulder comes forward with the punch, Black's head dips slightly to his right and his right hand comes up to parry a counter jab or block a counter hook. The lead foot is slightly turned in to make it easier to turn the left hip forward. Black's left shoulder protects his jawline.

The Jab

The jab is the single most important strike in any striking discipline and before we go any further I want to make clear just how much practice needs to be made of this technique. Your jab can *never* be good enough and requires constant, diligent practice. It is the closest strike to the opponent and the simplest counter. Barring gross discrepancies in speed, if two fighters throw simultaneous punches the fighter who is throwing the jab will land first and better in the great majority of cases. The exception lies in the fighter with a strategy designed to specifically counter the jab.

The jab is also a relatively safe position; the way that I advise to throw it – with the front foot slightly pointed in, allows a fighter to assume an almost side-on stance (slightly less side-on for sports that allow kicks to the legs), creating a very small target for the opponent.

Make sure that any time you jab you are stepping forward and dropping your weight onto your lead foot. If you want to read many excellent analogies to demonstrate this concept, I highly recommend Jack Dempsey's *Championship Fighting* which can be found many places online for free.

Most of all it is important to realise that your jab must be a power punch. If you cannot jab hard it will not perform any of its intended functions. Do not settle for a “blinding” jab. Rather look to perfect a smashing jolt; this will keep the opponent from stepping in recklessly and force him to make specific adjustments to counter your jab. If he does not make adjustments you can simply turn his face to putty with your jab, and if he does adjust there are only so many things he can do to stop you jabbing him, all of which we will work off later in *The Strategies*.

THE JAB IS EVERYTHING.

No amount of strategy will be of any use if you can't force the opponent into the reactions you want.

The Right Straight

Commonly called “The Cross”, the right straight is the most important power punch in any combat sport. The Cross is actually a specific counter that we will cover later which relies on a looping punch. For now let us consider the right straight. Just as with the jab a transfer of weight is necessary in the direction of the punch. To accomplish this a step forward is taken when throwing the right straight on its own.

When thrown immediately after the jab in a 1 – 2 it is important to make maximum use of the thrusting of the right hip forwards. This is where the power will come from, as your step will have been used to add power to the jab.

Learn to throw the right straight while moving backwards (as explained in the Footwork section on the burst) and forwards, and to use it off of ducks and dodges. Any time a right straight can be sneaked in, it should be.

Elementary Striking



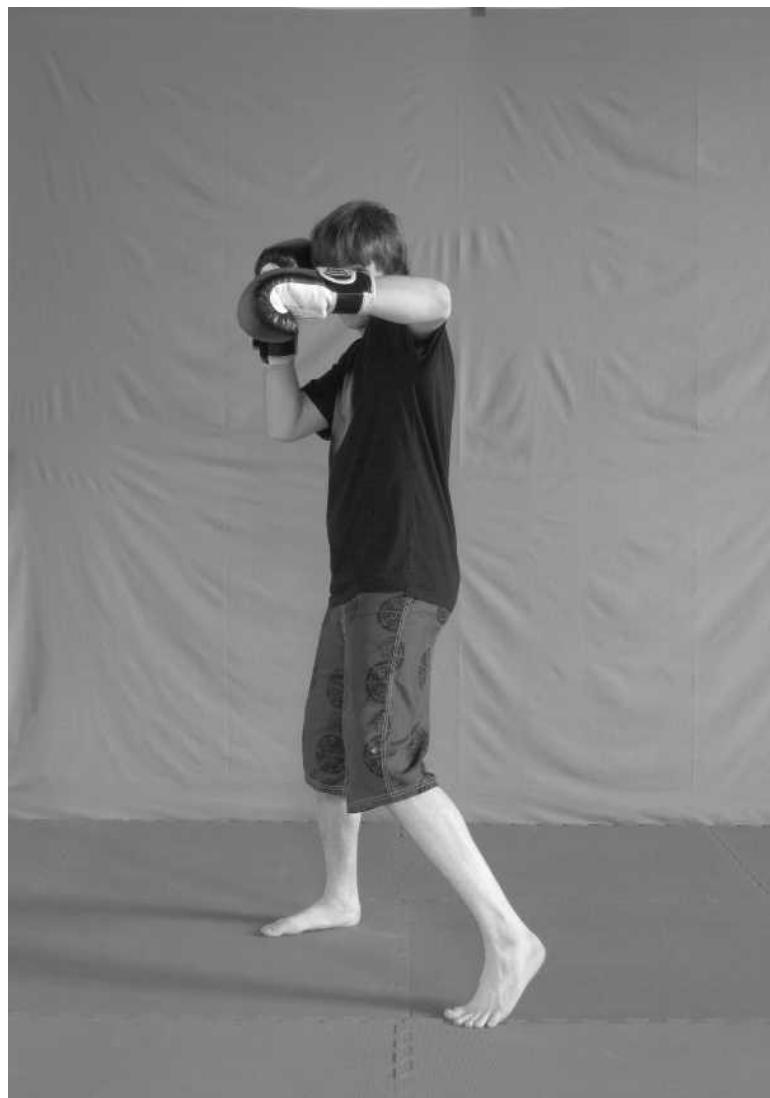
To throw a right straight, Black's left foot is placed forward and out to the left, then Black drives off of his right foot, rotates his right hip and shoulder forward and throws his right hand out, turning it palm down at the end of the motion. Notice how Black's right shoulder guards his chin.

Hooks

Hook punches are most people's more natural offence before they receive training, because they feel that they can gain more power by swinging their hand like a hammer than by driving it straight to the target. This can often be true, and technical hooks are among the most punishing strikes out there. A good hook, however, is very hard to master. The left hook, as the more versatile and popular option, will be described first. Standing in your normal stance, you may want to square up slightly. Then drive off of your left foot, whipping your hips around and turning your left shoulder almost to in front of your centreline. The arm should be raised and bent at a right angle, the fist turned so that the palm faces the floor. Longer hooks can be thrown, but they will lack the purity of punching power that the 90 degree bend in the arm provides. To throw a long whipping hook, turn the fist further over. By pointing the thumb down it is possible to land a hook effectively at almost arm's length.

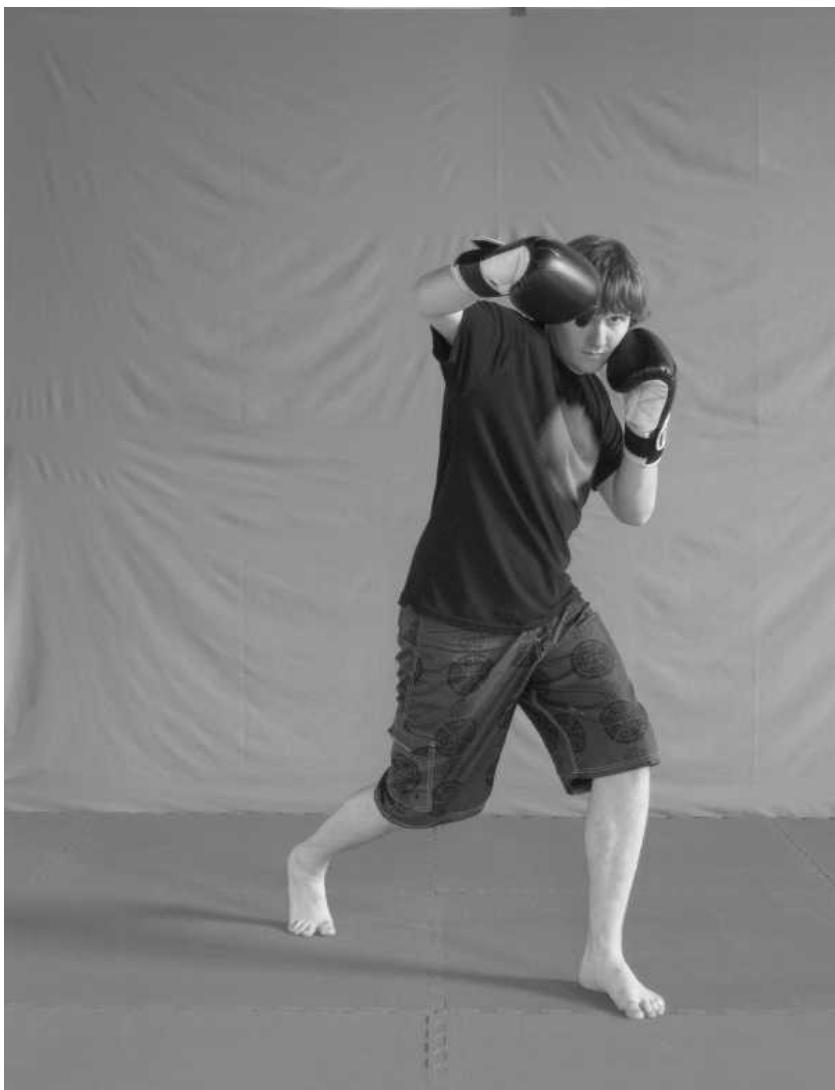
The right hook is a less popular punch and is so misunderstood that I am reluctant to cover it here in a manual on the basics. Just as with the right straight, drive off of the back leg, but rotate the hips and allow the right elbow to flare out, level with the shoulder. Turn the palm down and keep the arm bent at 90 degrees. To throw a longer hook, lessen the bend in the arm and turn the fist over further.

Elementary Striking



Black throws the left hook from his fighting stance by pushing off of the ball of his left foot, whipping his hips to his right and allowing his elbow to come up, level with his fist. As the hook comes across, the right forearm is kept high to block counter hooks.

Elementary Striking



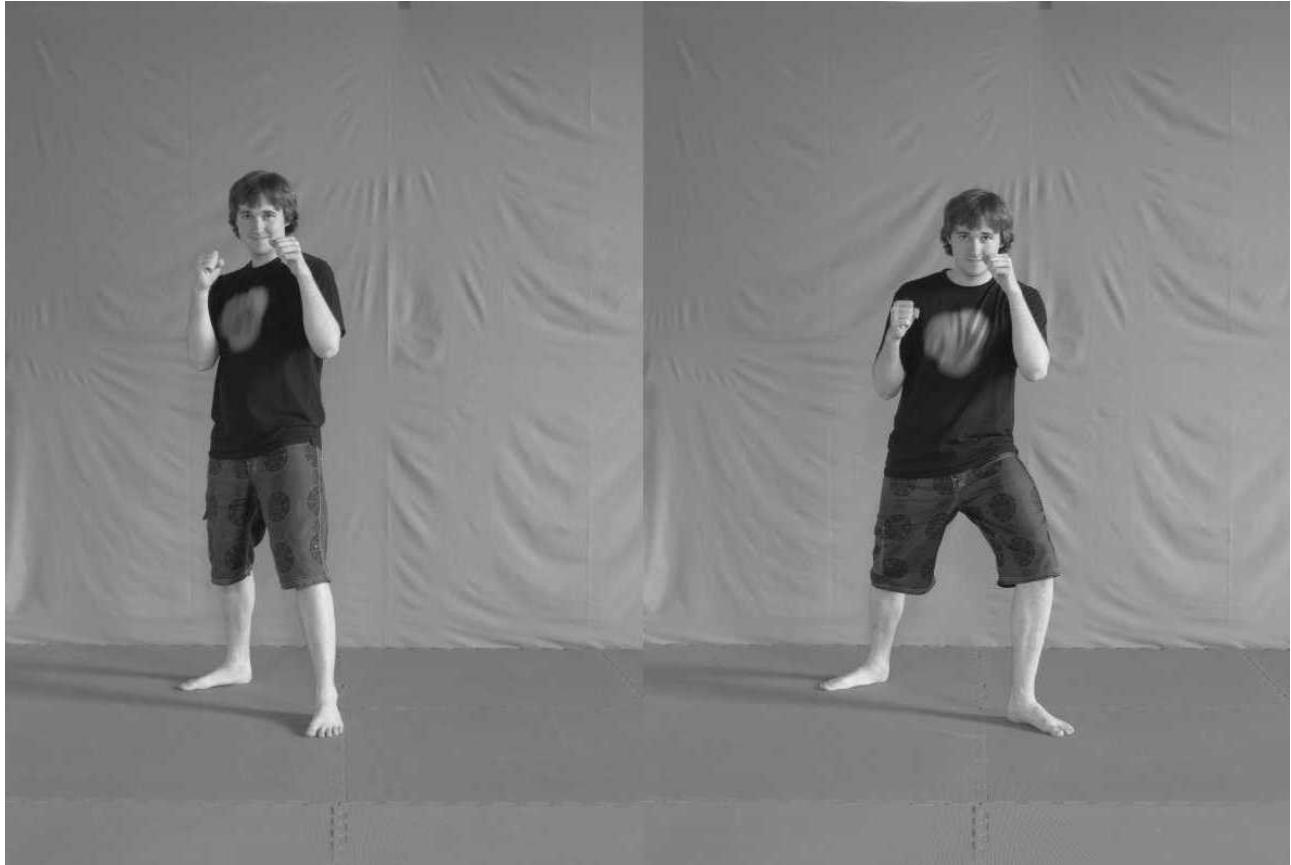
To throw the right hook Black steps out to his left with his left foot, dips his head slightly off line to the left and drives his right hip forward. The elbow comes slightly higher in a right hook the majority of the time as it is intended to travel over an opponent's jab.

Kicks

Roundhouse Kick

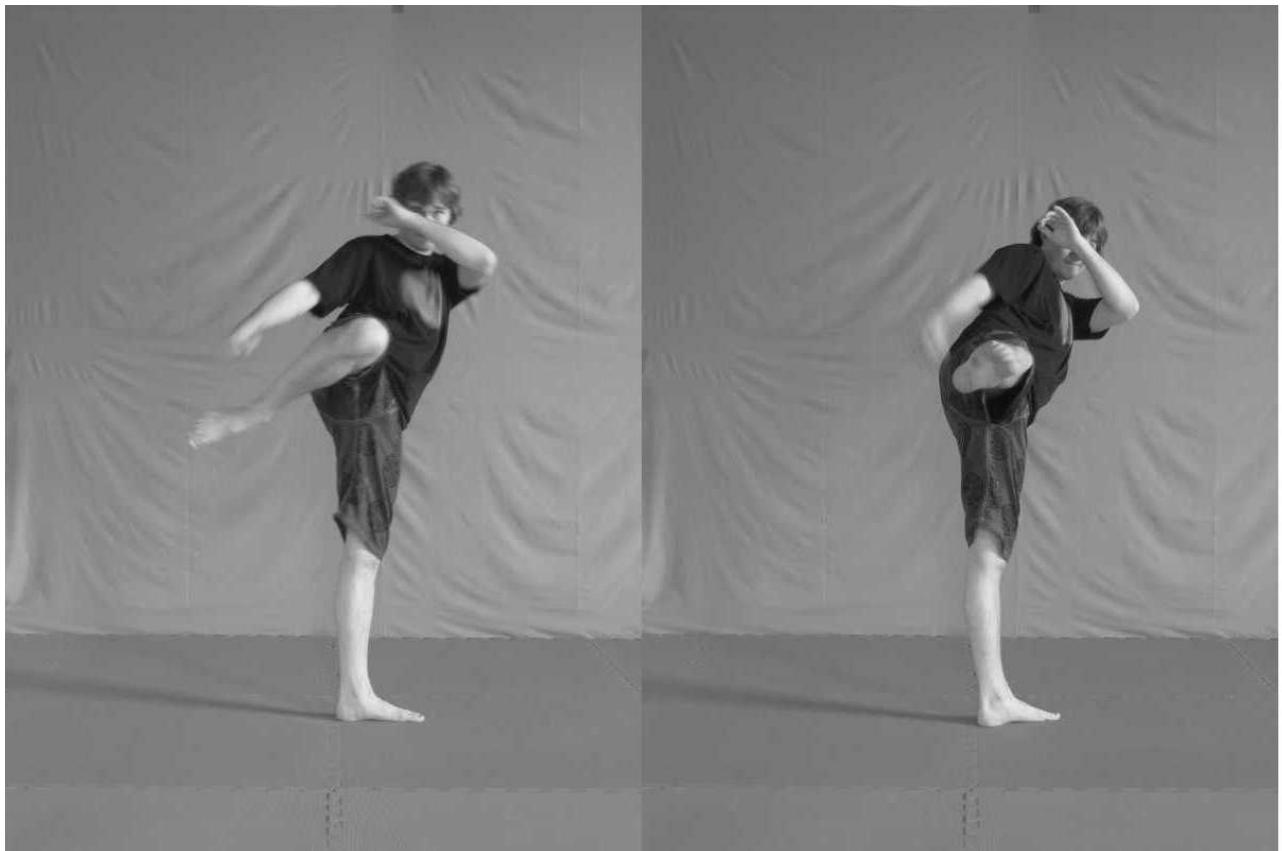
To perform this kick take your basic stance, then take a step forty-five degrees to the front left with your left foot. This places your opponent at a 2 o'clock position and produces a stretching sensation across the groin. Immediately give in to this stretch and release your back foot, whipping it around into the side of your opponent, connecting with any part of the shin but that level with the ankle joint. This set-up step makes the kick more telegraphed but more than doubles the power and can easily be coincided with punches to confuse most opponents. The target in this kick is literally anything from the head to the calves with the exception of the only two bones which are much denser than the shin – the elbow and the knee. Kicking either of these will be incredibly detrimental to your ability for the rest of the fight.

Elementary Striking



To initiate a roundhouse kick with the right leg, Black takes a step outward to forty five degrees with his left foot.

Elementary Striking



Pivoting on the ball of his foot, Black brings his knee up and whips his kick through. The contact point should be the shin. Notice that Black swings his right arm back to counter balance and draws his left elbow across his face to catch any counter punch his opponent throws – hopefully breaking their hand in the process.

Elementary Striking



To throw a left leg roundhouse kick Black steps his right foot forward and out at forty five degrees.

Elementary Striking



Then brings his knee through, swinging his left arm back and keeping his right elbow across his face.

Elementary Striking



Push Kick

The push kick, or teep, is a common feature of Muay Thai and kickboxing. While not designed to knock an opponent out it is extremely useful for driving them off balance constantly, preventing them from striking and causing them to over-commit (in turn opening them up for strikes, as will be discussed later). To perform the teep, bring the knee of the kicking leg up in front of you, then push the opponent back with the ball of your foot. While this kick isn't likely to knock anyone out when aimed at the conventional target, the abdomen or hips, you can certainly wind an opponent with it.

Elementary Striking



To begin the push kick, bring the knee up in front of your chest.

Elementary Striking



Then thrust forward with the hips and drive the ball of your foot towards your opponent.

Elementary Striking



To perform the push kick with the right leg is just as easy. Raise the knee to your chest.

Elementary Striking



Then drive forward with the hips. The back leg kick actually has a longer range than the lead leg kick, due to the standing leg being closer to the opponent.

Front Snap Kick

Snap kicks have always been one of the first kicks learned in traditional martial arts but have only recently begun to receive acceptance in the wider combat sport community. Where the teep is a push kick, the snap kick relies on creating a whip out of the leg, allowing the lower leg to snap forward, striking the target with the ball of the foot, and return without transferring all of the weight into the opponent.

Elementary Striking



Black draws his right heel up to his buttocks, or at least as close as he can get it without discomfort. This coils the kick. This position should not be held. From a basic stance Black drives off of his back foot before lifting it to his buttock, then proceeds through the following motions rapidly.

Elementary Striking



Black allows the knee to come forward, in front of his hips (or chest if he intends to kick higher) then allows the lower leg to whip out. The ball of the foot connects with the opponent's ribs, solar plexus or chin.

Elementary Striking



Black allows his leg to whip back before he places it down either in front or behind him.

Elementary Striking

The Intangibles



Elementary Striking

In the striking arts the basic techniques will not land with any regularity unless you do something to force the opponent to present openings through which to strike. No one is magical – you can't consistently punch through an opponent's defences right off of the bat. As this is the case, before we get on to specific strategies we will talk about the intangibles: small movements that you can use to land strikes from a head on position with the opponent, without the need to cut an angle or fire a lengthy combination.

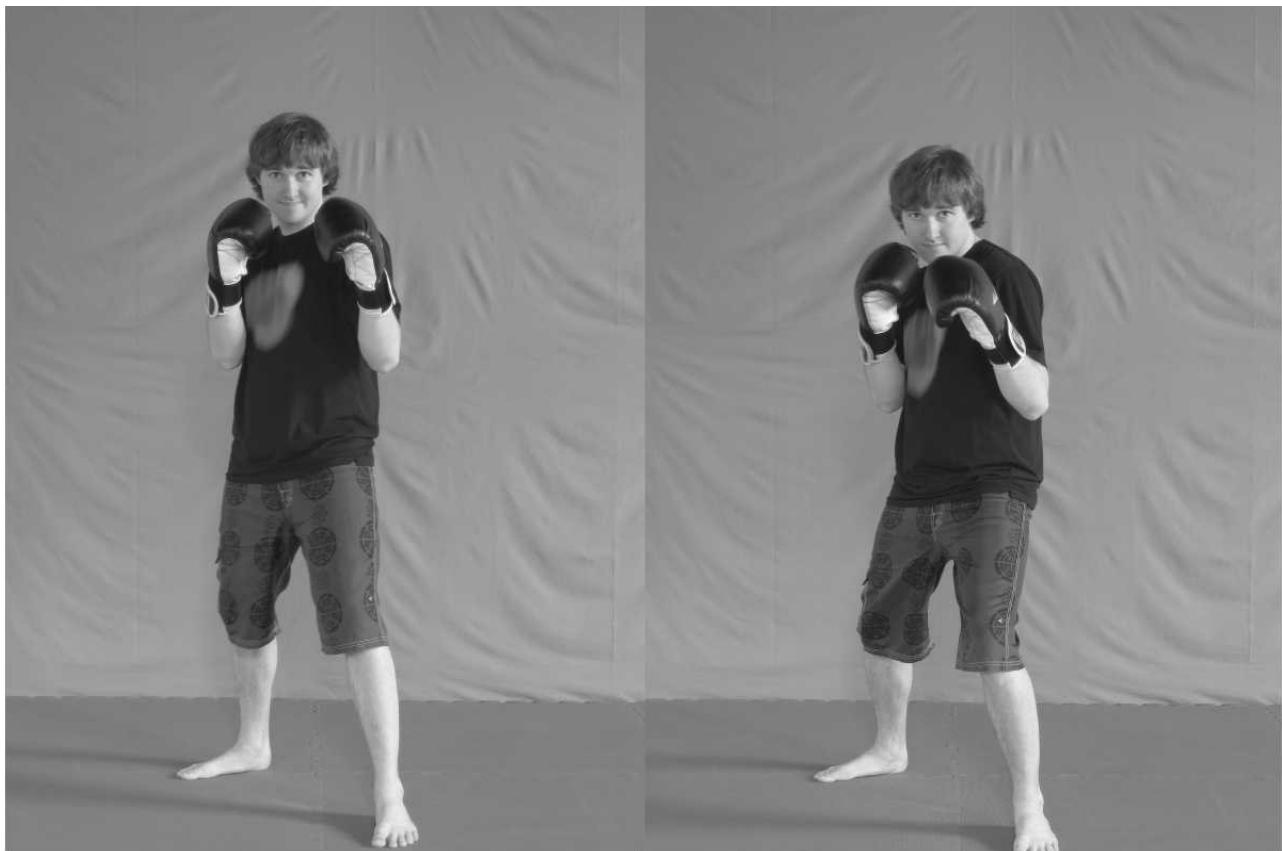
Feinting

Feinting is the art of making a fake, non-committal attack to force an opponent to move, opening an opportunity through which to strike. We'll talk more about specific examples in the strategy section but for now it is worth learning to shoulder feint.

To fake a jab, simply bend the lead leg to drop your weight slightly and move your lead shoulder slightly towards the opponent. Against an opponent who lacks experience or discipline this may be the only feint needed to keep the opponent off guard. At any rate this subtle, non-committal feint should be thrown frequently throughout a bout even if just to keep the opponent from stepping in. Against an aggressive fighter the faked jab will slow their pace and make them cautious. Against a counter puncher the faked jab has the opposite effect, encouraging the opponent to step in so that you may catch him with a hard right punch.

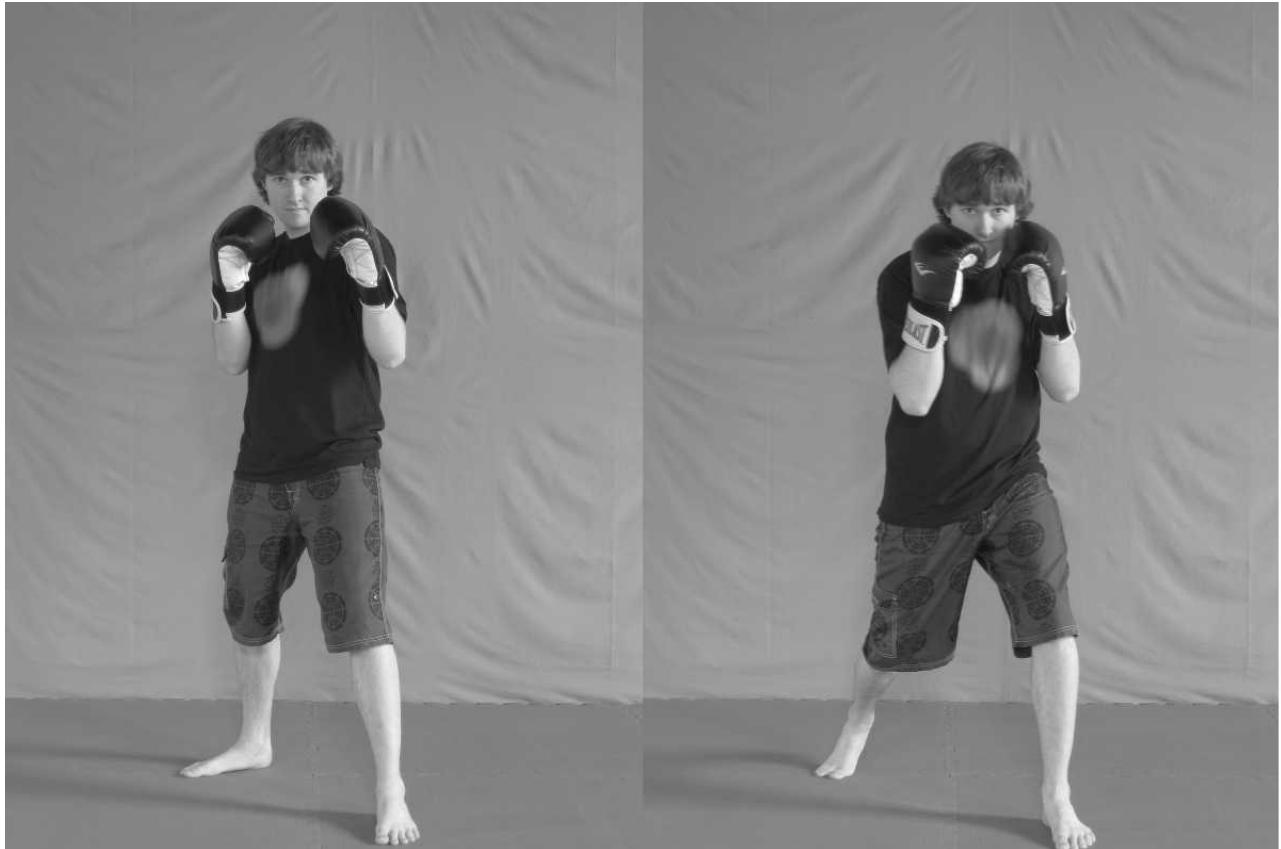
To fake a right punch, simply square your shoulders. This puts you in position to throw a left hook. This is especially useful if the opponent can be convinced to slip or move to counter.

Elementary Striking



To feint a jab, Black bends his left knee and pushes his left shoulder towards his opponent.

Elementary Striking

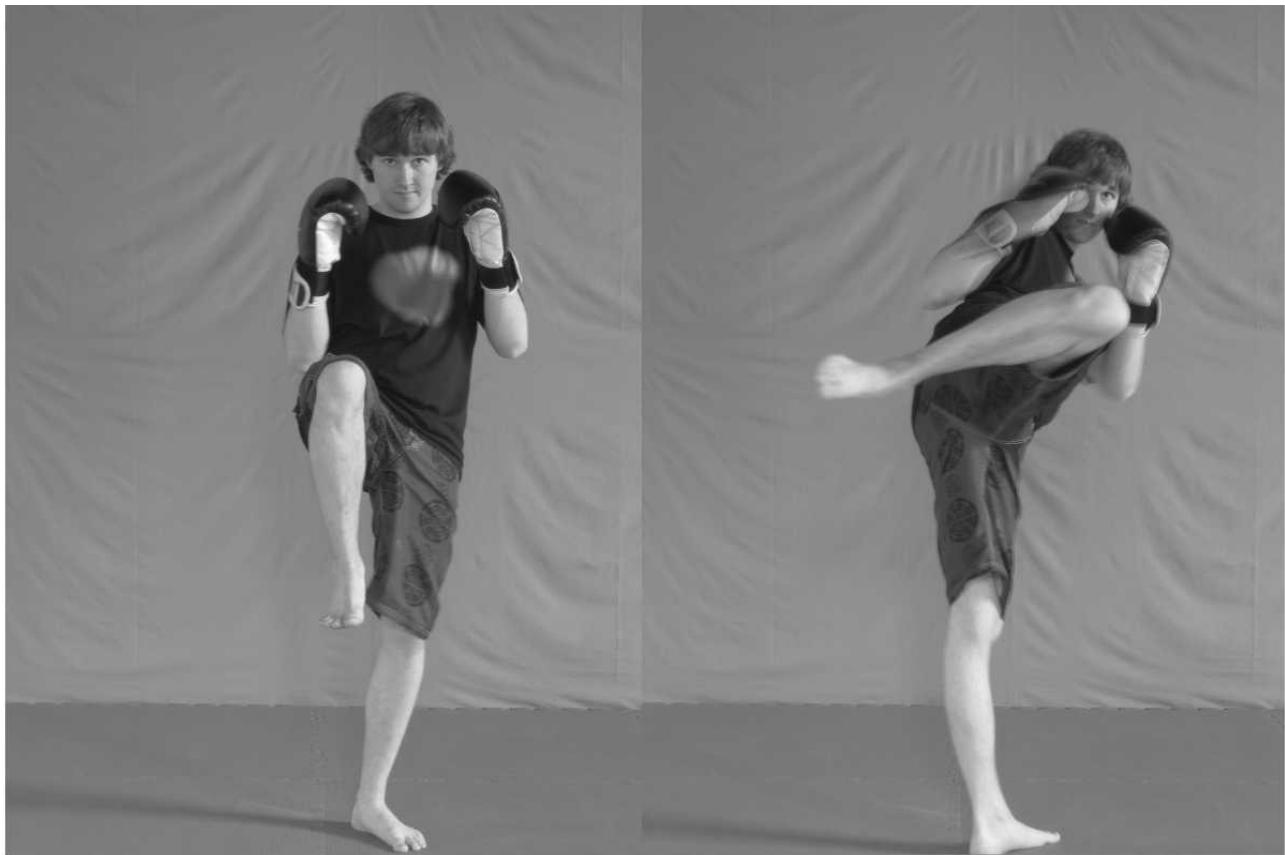


To fake a right straight Black pushes off of his back foot and turns his right shoulder forward. From here he can throw a left hook or a hard jab.

Chambered Kicks

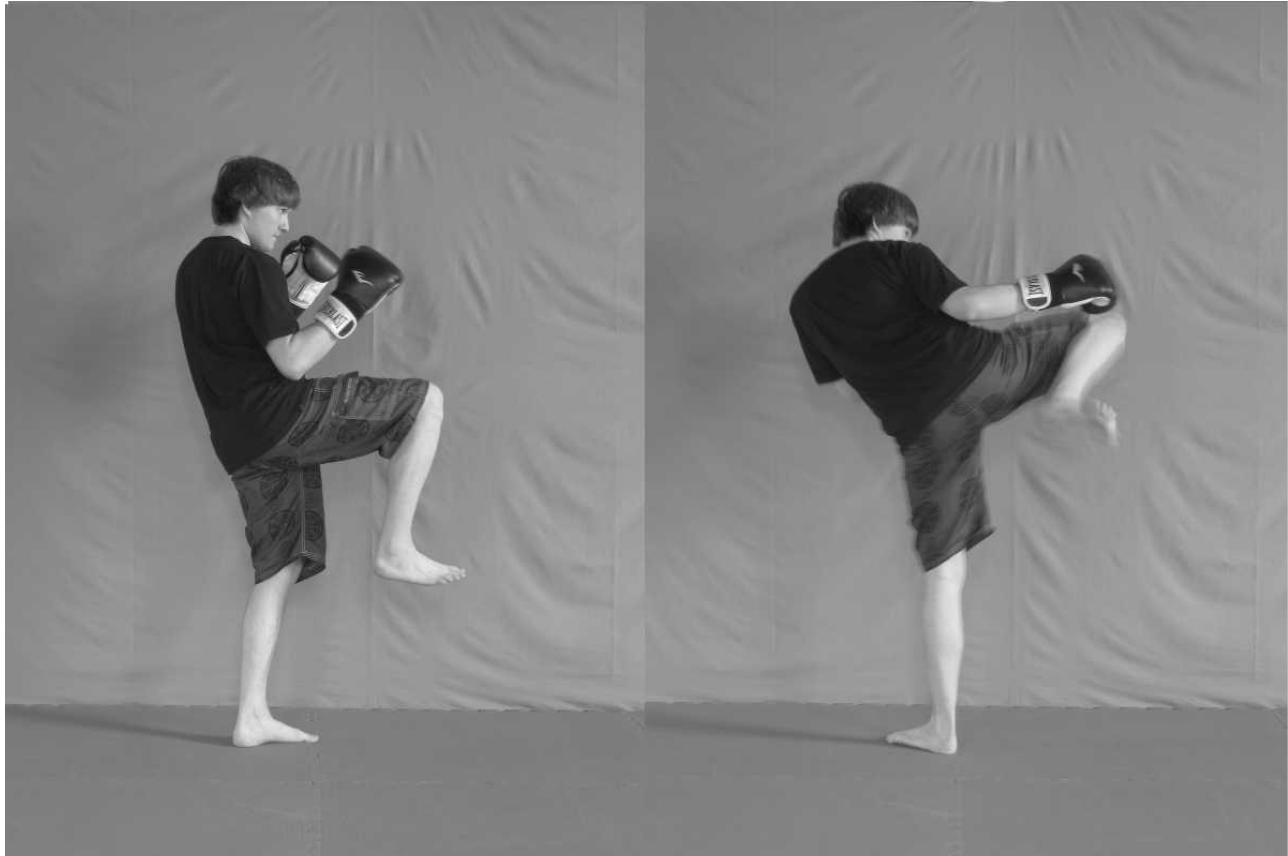
Kicks can be landed without setup by learning to chamber front kicks and high roundhouse kicks from the same position, with the knee up in front of the body. Get in the habit of delivering front kicks often enough that your opponent is forced to react. Once the opponent is reacting to front kicks the leg may be chambered for a front kick but turned into a roundhouse kick to the head. To achieve this, simply raise the knee for a front kick but pivot on the standing leg as you would for a round house kick. Turn your kicking hip through to point at the opponent and turn your kicking leg at the hip joint to snap the kick in from the side.

Elementary Striking



To change a front kick to a roundhouse kick, Black lifts his right knee as if to push kick or snap kick, then uses the momentum to turn on the ball of his foot and bring his right hip all the way through, leaving his left hip behind him and turning his body sideways. Simultaneously Black turns the right leg at the hip joint so that it can transfer the momentum generated into a roundhouse kick.

Elementary Striking



Here is the side view. Notice that Black's standing foot pivots during the movement – this is of incredible importance if you plan to keep your knees uninjured.

Milling

Milling is very important to disguising jabs and lead hooks. Though there are variations, a basic milling motion can be performed with the lead hand quite easily. The hand describes a rough circle in front of the fighter, moving first toward the opponent then back toward the body. Each time the lead arm extends slightly it can be made to look like a jab, then as it is lowered and retracted it is coiled outside of the body for a jab or lead hook or simply extended and circled again. This form of movement can be used to hypnotize the opponent, disguise attacks and keep opponents guessing. Another variation of milling is to sway the lead arm back and forth in front of the body to disguise jabs, hooks and backhanded jabs.

Elementary Striking



Black lazily circles his lead hand between an almost extended position and a position just outside of his body. This is the act of milling.

Elementary Striking



From the coiled position Black may disguise the set up for either a jab (left) or a hook (right).

Elementary Striking

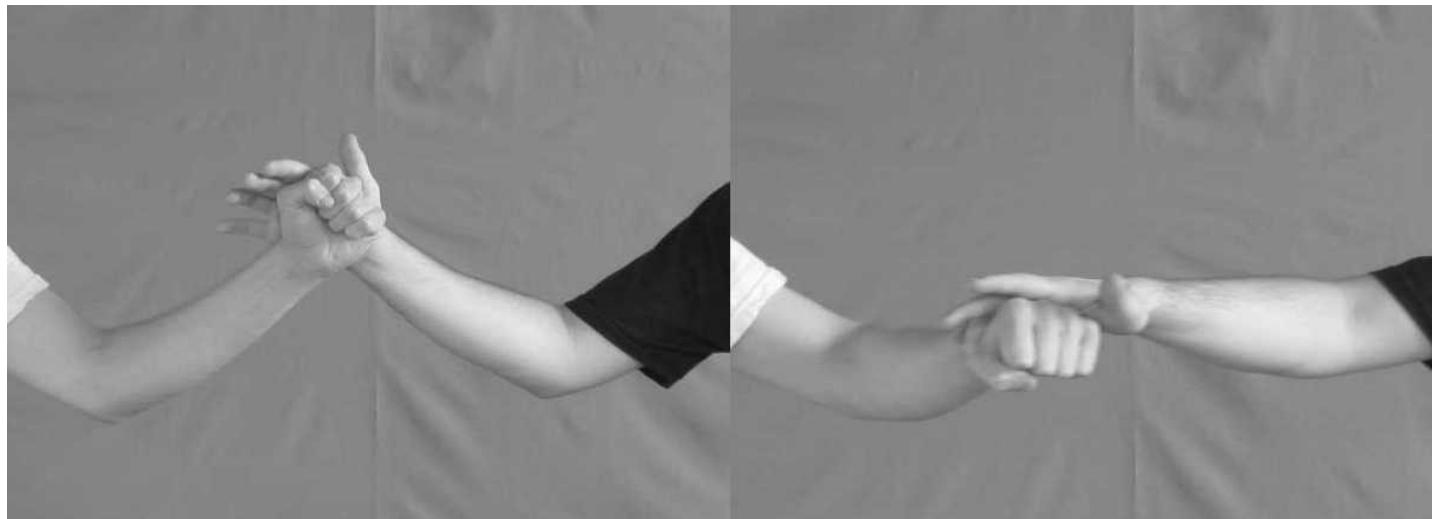


Here is another view. The top two frames demonstrate the milling motion, and the bottom two frames demonstrate the jab (left) and the hook (right).

Handfighting

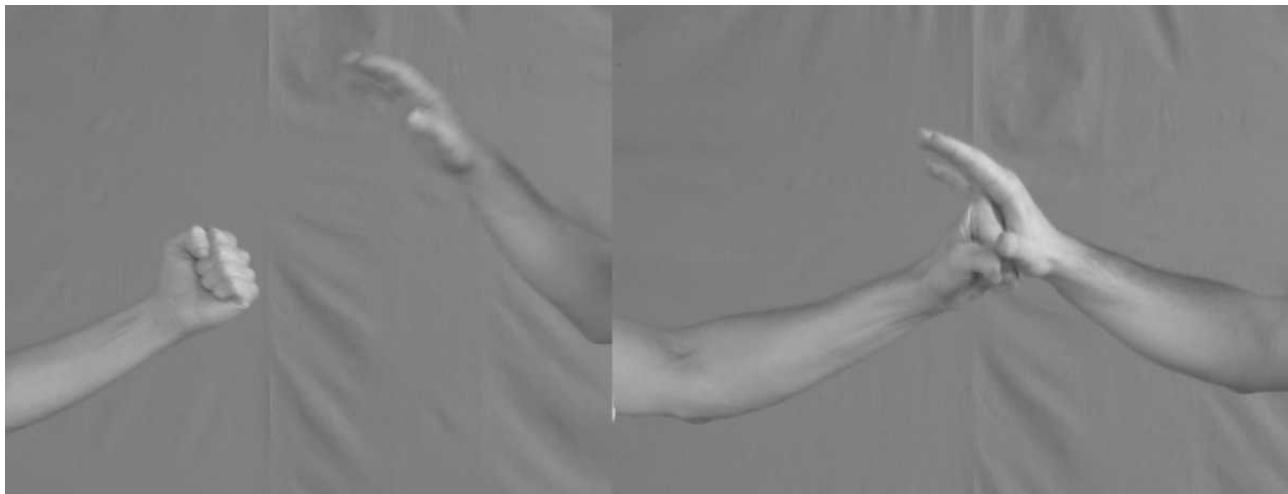
Handfighting is the act of trying to remove the opponent's guard by simply ripping or slapping their hands aside. There are several ways of accomplishing this: the opponent's lead hand may be covered, slapped inward, outward, up or down, or simply held. The use of the lead hand to slap the opponent's lead hand out of the way and present a target is one that many traditional martial arts students learn in their first weeks of sparring but a more useful strategy is the use of the rear hand to slap the opponent's lead hand aside, momentarily leaving only your lead hand and his slower rear hand active.

Elementary Striking



If one fighter is orthodox and the other is southpaw, this is how the handfighting will look. Both fighters should try to obtain outside position so that they may drag the opponent's hand out of position and punch past it.

Elementary Striking



If you are in the same stance as your opponent, you may use your rear hand to limit the opponent's jabbing options. In the left frame it seems as though little is going on, but as the right frame demonstrates, the opponent's line to jab is disrupted.

Closed Guard vs Open Guard Concepts

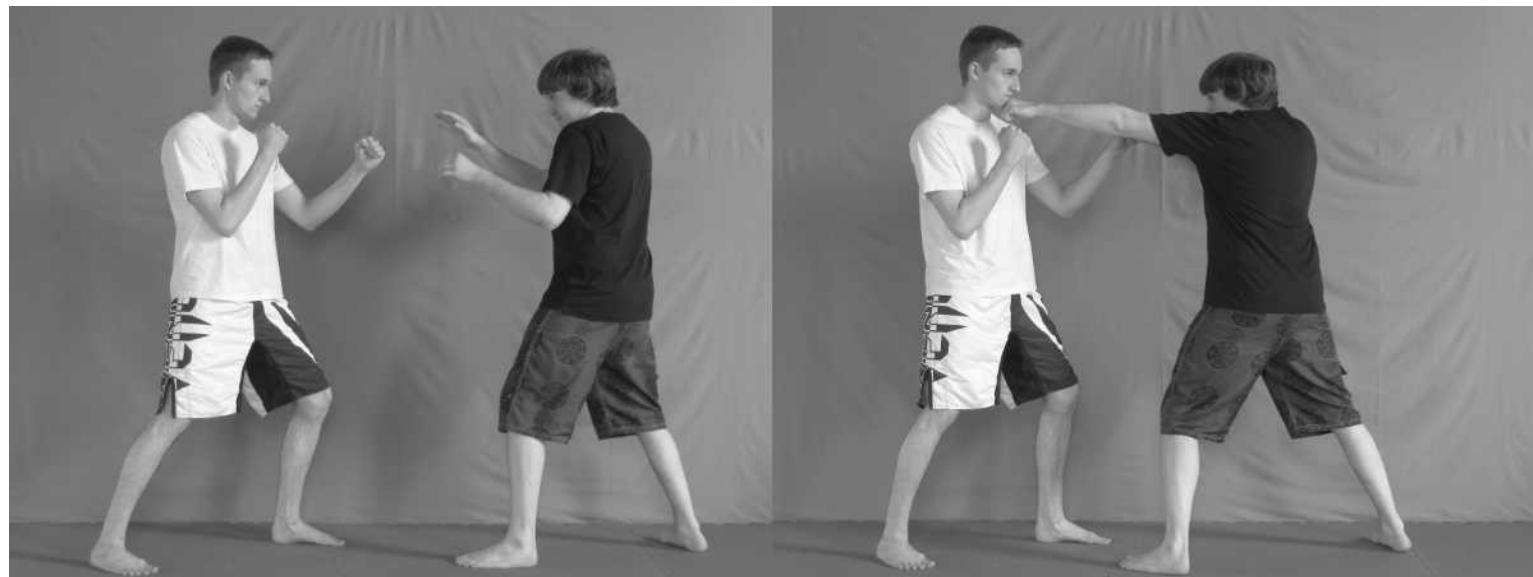
The distinction between open guard and closed guard is integral to gaining an all-round understanding of the striking arts. A great many boxers and kickboxers become great with just one stance, but knowing how to fight from both stances also gives a fighter great advantages. He will know what a southpaw opponent is looking for, and can simply switch stances when in trouble. Additionally, switching stances mid combination changes the relationship between your stance and your opponent's, which in turn means that you may catch him by surprise as his defence fails to catch up to the new dynamic you are presenting him. Understanding open and closed guard ultimately means understanding that a fight is a dynamic relationship between oneself and one's opponent, not simply two people attempting techniques at random and hoping that they work.

Closed guard is the standard fighting position that you will encounter most often: both fighters in an orthodox stance, or both fighters in a southpaw stance. From this position the lead hand will always be the most difficult to defend as it is closest and easiest to land. Circling to one's rear side should be the more common footwork from closed guard as circling to one's lead side will take you into the opponent's power hand (though as with everything in the striking arts this is subject to judgement. For example, if the opponent is in a left stance and has an amazing left hook, the smart thing to do might be to circle away from it and risk his less powerful right hand).

The Open Guard position is where there is a mismatch of stances: one fighter is in an orthodox stance and one is in a southpaw stance. The jab becomes pretty ineffectual from this position and it becomes about both fighters using their lead hand to trap their opponent's lead hand, stepping their lead foot outside of the opponent's lead foot, and throwing their rear straight as fast as possible. Stepping outside of the opponent's lead foot gives a fighter a slight dominant angle and allowing his rear hip to move for the rear straight inside of his opponent's rear hip, making it possible to scientifically win the exchange 9 out of 10 times.

Elementary Striking mostly covers techniques from a closed guard position, but many of the strategies can be adapted and made to work just as easily from open guard. More specialised advice on approaching open guard contests, as well as more advanced strategies such as switch-hitting, are beyond the scope of this book.

Elementary Striking



Here is a demonstration of hand fighting from the same stance or closed guard. Black smothers White's jabbing options and steps in with his own jab.

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Hand fighting from open guard (opposite stances) relies on keeping your hand outside of the opponent's, then slapping it inward as you step outside his lead leg and throw a rear hand straight.

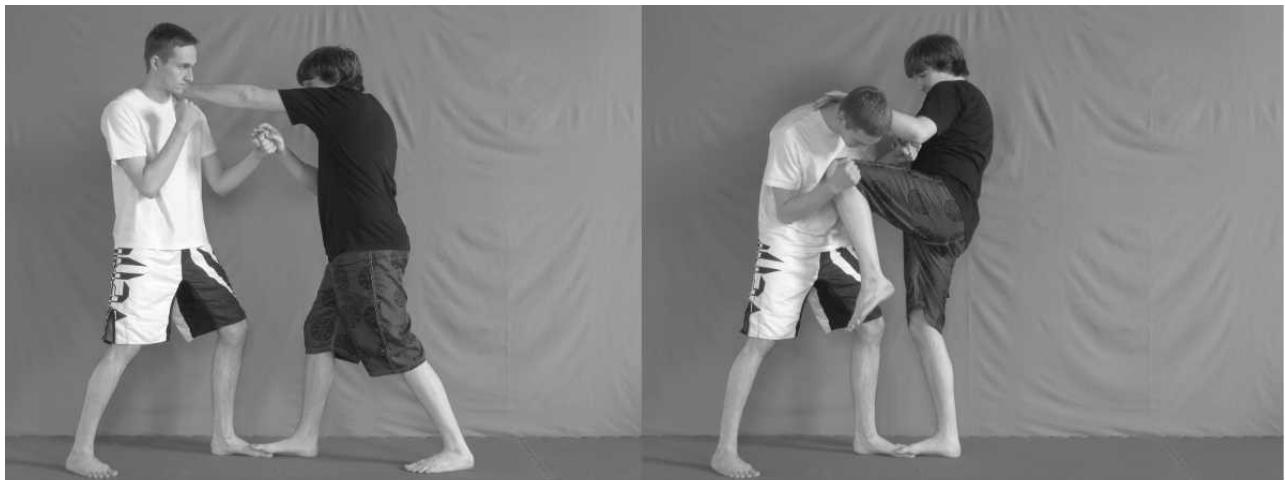
Foot Traps / Off-Balancing

Foot traps are remarkably underused in combat sports. Occasionally a particularly dirty boxer will find use for them for an almost guaranteed knockdown, but on the whole they are thoroughly underutilized. Foot traps can be performed by stepping on the opponent's lead foot. From here a punch will often cause a knockdown due to the opponent being unable to get his feet under him when he is knocked backwards.

Off-balancing is the act of using kicks to the calves and ankles to break the opponent's balance and force him to correct – giving time to score a strike.

This links in closely with leg sweeping. Leg sweeping is using one's legs to take the opponent's legs out from under him. There are hundreds of variations which again, are beyond the scope of this book. Due to their immense variety and specialised nature, they will require more space to examine correctly.

Elementary Striking



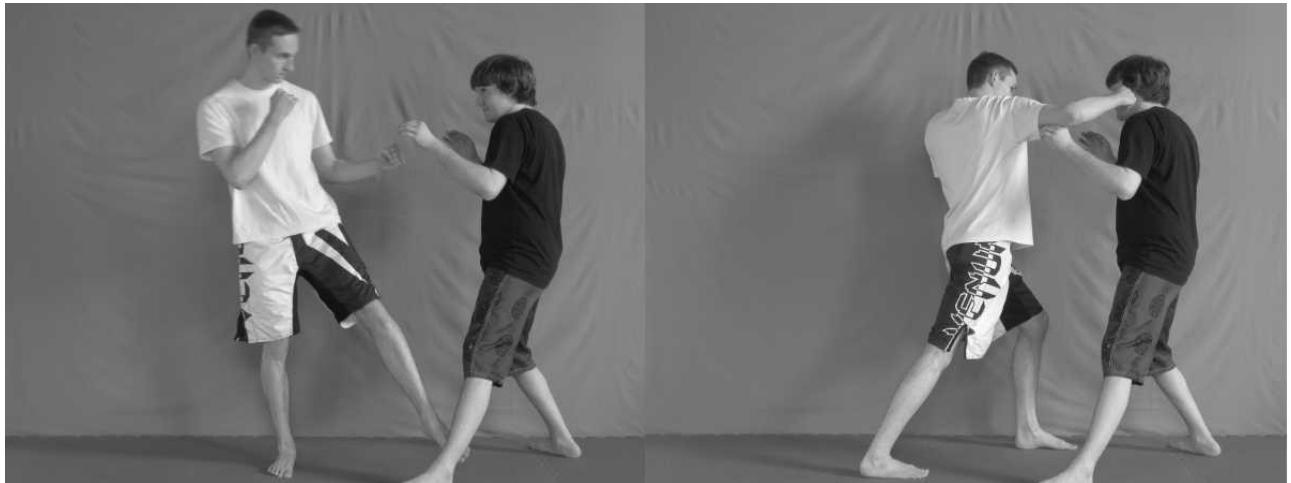
Black uses his right foot to trap White's foot as he uses his right hand to eliminate White's jab. Black then connects a hard left knee.

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Off-balancing from open guard is a simple tactic. Here Black kicks White's calf to break his stance, before placing his kicking foot outside of his opponent's lead foot and connecting a hard left straight. Notice how this low kick is very difficult to catch with the hands.

Elementary Striking



From Closed Guard (same stances) White kicks the inside of Black's shin to drag him out of stance and place White in perfect position to connect a short right hook.

The Strategies



Establishing the Jab

The jab is rightly considered the focal technique of scientific boxing and by extension striking as a whole. A great many fighters with average skills in other areas have founded careers on the jab, and conversely there have been fighters with great power, ability and speed who suffered due to a lack of jabbing proficiency. “Establish the jab” is an instruction that you will hear hundreds upon hundreds of times during your time in striking sports; fighters blame it for success or failure, commentators spout it during the early stages of a bout, and coaches repeat it over and over to their charges between rounds. But few actually qualify what they mean by this.

Often coaches who preach “establishing the jab” simply mean that a fighter should spam jabs at his opponent until they magically start working. Our concern, however, is not with luck but with science. In this chapter we will look at methodically establishing a relatively safe lead technique with the jab, then building on it. Firstly, it is necessary to understand that to have any success with combinations you must make your opponent adapt to deal with your jab. Weak jabs will not cut it here; jab hard or go home. Traditionally the lead straight was referred to as the “jolt” before it became a distraction tactic in later generations. We want to re-establish this tradition of the jolt and make the opponent fear attacking.

A strong jolt is thrown from the basic on-guard stance by taking a step forward with the lead foot of about six inches, dropping the weight, moving the head off line slightly to the rear-hand side, and driving the lead hand out to strike the opponent with the full weight of your body. Your lead shoulder should be tucked to your chin as you punch and your body should be almost side-on, with a slight bend at the stomach to keep the head below the lead shoulder and off of the centre line. The rear hand should be held high so that the forearm can stop wild swings with the opponent's left hand, as often happens when you strike an opponent unexpectedly.

This is the basic *dipping jab* or jolt and is responsible for keeping your opponent off of you and putting him on the defensive. Almost every lead that your opponent is likely to throw with his hands can be countered with a powerful step in and dipping jab, and it is the reason that fighters cannot simply walk in on each other. If you are having trouble keeping men off of you in sparring, or ever hope to begin effectively firing power combinations, invest in this technique.

Elementary Striking



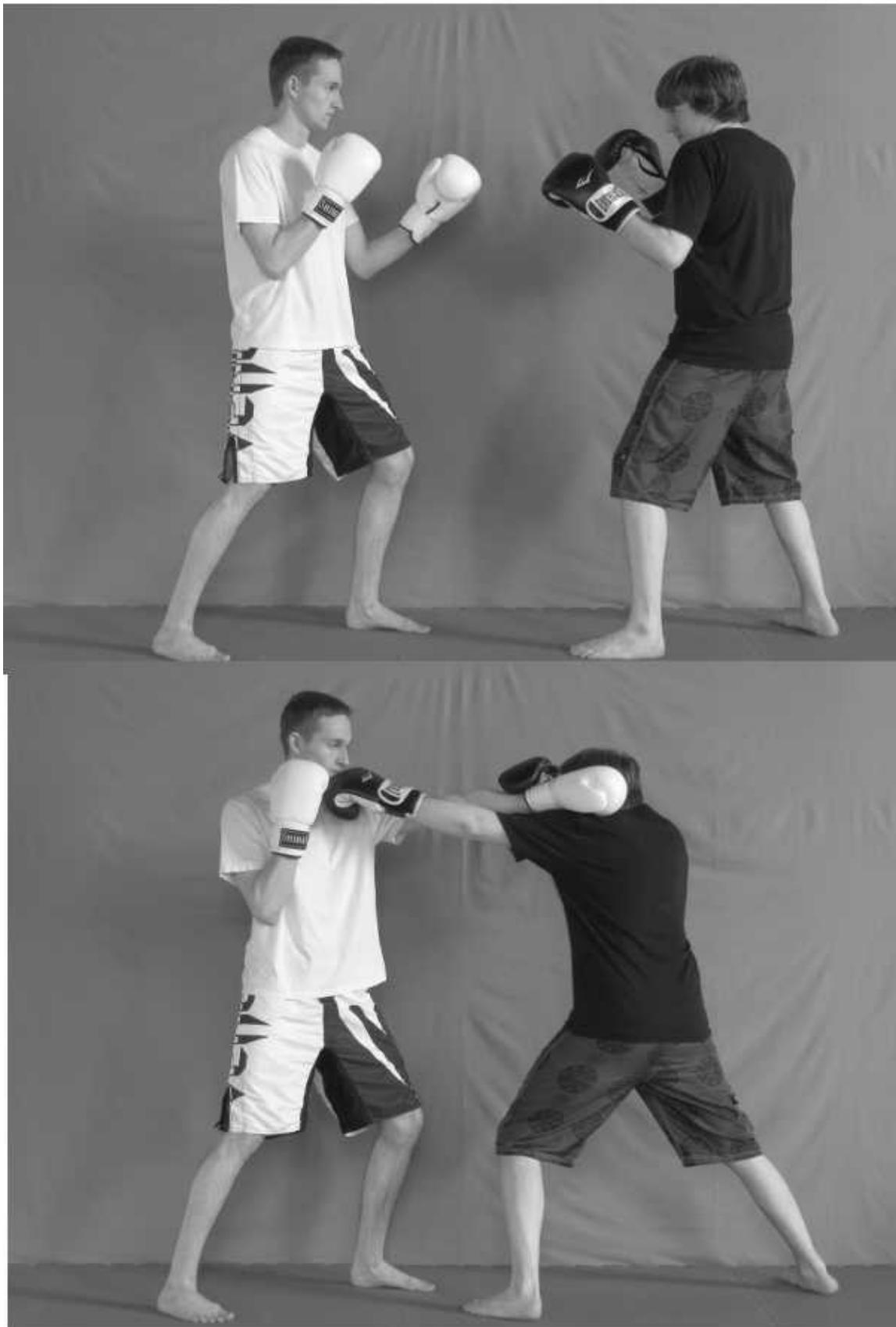
White and Black are squared off in stance. Black uses his rear hand to eliminate White's jab, slapping White's lead hand down. Black jumps in with a hard jab, leaning his head toward White's eliminated left hand.

Elementary Striking



Notice that if White throws his remaining hand he has little chance of connecting. A right hand is slower than a jab as it travels from further away. Black also leans towards White's eliminated left hand, taking his head away from White's right hand.

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A second way of establishing the jab is to walk the opponent down until he attacks, and counter with a dipping jab.

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The dipping jab is an effective answer to many attacks. Again Black successfully dips away from White's right hand even though he is expecting a jab.

Building Combinations

Once the jab is established, the opponent will have a limited number of ways to deal with it. The most common are covering up, moving back, or focusing on parrying or catching the jab with his rear hand. Each of these reactions can be attacked in a different way, and if he fails to react strongly enough to defend the jab, you can simply continue ruining him with your longest, fastest, safest and most practiced attack. In this chapter we will discuss the ways to build combinations appropriately around your opponent's reactions, rather than simply throwing everything and the kitchen sink at him until something sticks. Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson, both of whom began their offence from this dipping jab, are great examples of intelligent combination fighters that you should seek to emulate. Both men fought out of the "Blackburn crouch," but what made their combinations so superb to watch was that every punch was designed to set up another one.

Opponent Covers Up

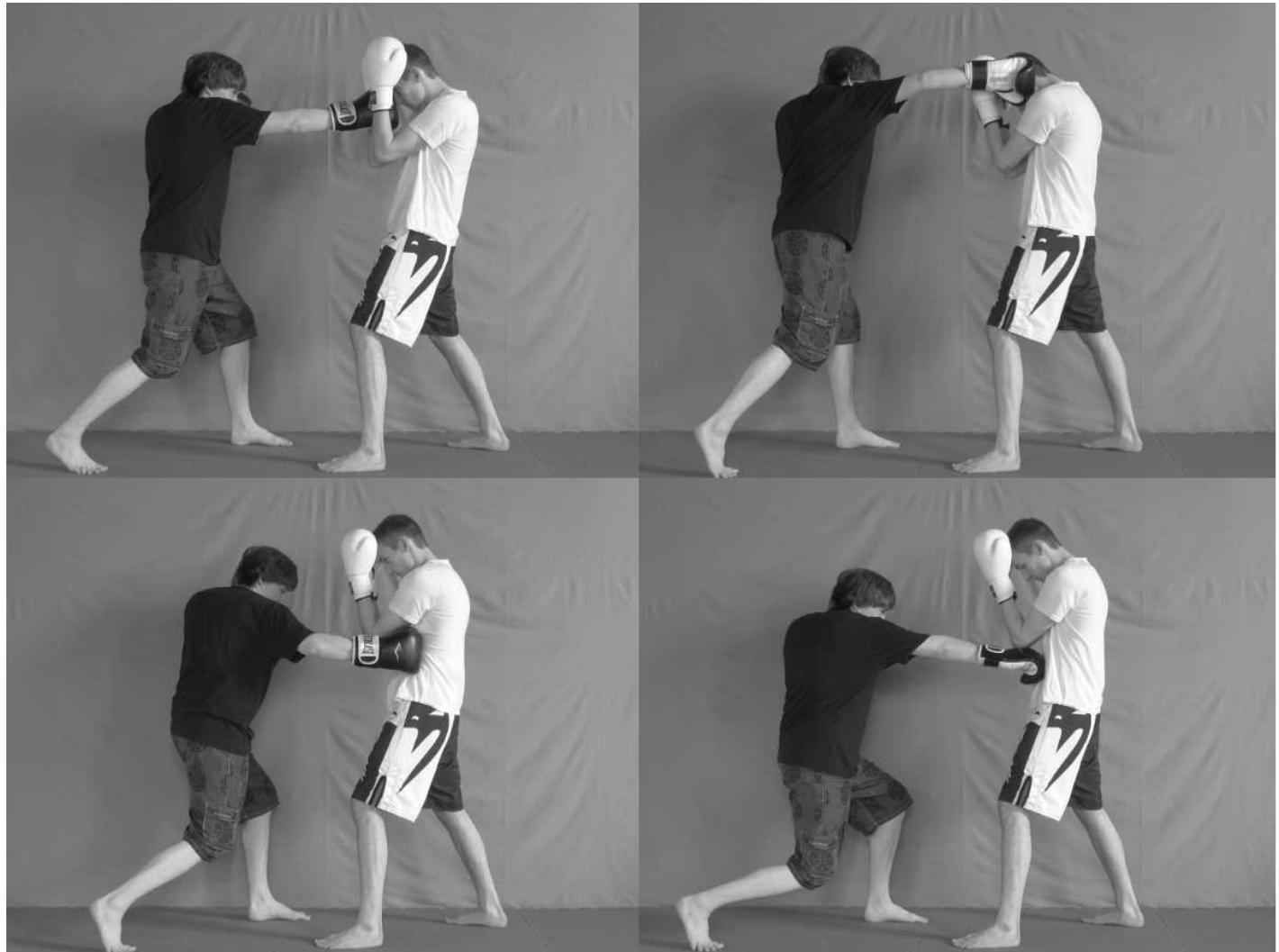
If the opponent covers up with his forearms high for fear of your jab, it is a nice idea to take advantage of this window of relative safety. Throw an upright jab (unlike the dipping jab) to blind him momentarily and follow it with a rear-hand punch - this is the traditional 1-2. While compromising protection, using an upright jab gives you the vision to assess where to aim your rear hand, and allows the follow-up to be thrown faster. A rear-hand punch thrown after a dipping jab must cover more distance and takes some dexterity to pull off quickly. The second punch should always be followed by a duck and weave out to the rear-hand side, to anticipate and avoid the common left hook counter.

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White is covering up whenever Black tries to land his jab. As White refuses to give Black anything to counter, Black must begin to follow up on White.

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Effective follow ups are the right straight through the middle of the forearms (top left), a right hook behind the opponents arms (top right), a right hook behind White's right elbow (bottom left), a right straight to the solar plexus (bottom right).

Opponent Parries

An opponent who most commonly resorts to parrying your jab with his rear hand is normally a disciplined one, but even a disciplined response can be exploited. His right hand coming in to catch or parry the jab means that the right side of his jaw is exposed. This opening is best exploited using a jab to left hook or a jab to left high kick.

Elementary Striking



White jabs and Black parries it, exposing the right side of Black's face. White steps up with his right foot before throwing a left high kick.

Elementary Striking



A more orthodox exploitation of an opponent parrying your jab is to jab and follow it with a rapid left hook behind his parry.

Elementary Striking



Notice that a change in distance is necessary to land the hook. After the jab, drop the left hand slightly, and step inward with the left hook. This is a difficult technique to perform quickly with power.

Lumberjacking

Lumberjacking is the strategy of hacking away at the opponent's legs with low roundhouse kicks until he cannot stand or overcompensates and allows you to strike him elsewhere. It is an extremely basic strategy, and not one that is often employed well. Against average opponents, however, attacking the legs can make all the difference. Attacks to the legs can be seen, just as with body strikes, as "money in the bank". They are an investment that will pay dividends further into the bout. Firstly, you may score a TKO if the opponent is so inept at checking kicks that he is hobbled to the point where he cannot stand. Secondly, any damage you can do to the opponent's legs, mainly in swelling and bruising, reduces their mobility and thereby limits their punching power, grappling abilities, and ability to avoid strikes to other targets. Finally, the low kick immediately compromises balance, offering the possibility of a powerful follow up strike.

Some excellent low kickers to study are Rob Kaman, Ernesto Hoost, Peter Aerts, Gokhan Saki, Daniel Ghita and Melvin Manhoef. In MMA, Pedro Rizzo and Jose Aldo also found amazing success with their rear leg roundhouse kicks. Of course, if you hope to avoid having your leg caught, or your shin bruised or fractured by the opponent's check, there must be some strategy dictating your lumberjacking offense.

The idea of low kicking generally is to distract your opponent and force him to cover with a salvo of punches to the head, and then follow with the low kick into his thigh, damaging the sciatic nerve. The act of punching should negate his attempting to counter or catch the kick, and by punching his defences hard you can keep both of his feet planted for balance and prevent him from raising his knee to check your kick.

This is an excellent strategy to follow once the jab and punching combinations have been established. You might also want to begin working it early in a bout by simply flurrying punches with no real intention of connecting. As a general rule, however, from an orthodox stance it is best to set up right low kicks with left hooks and left low kicks with right straights.

The jab - right straight - left hook is an excellent initiating combination for the right low kick because the left hook against an opponent's guard drives the opponent's weight onto his lead leg.

Alternatively, throwing the kick as a counter to the opponent's forward movement is an excellent way to avoid having your kick checked. It is near impossible to check a kick while stepping forward. If you can slip inside an opponent's jab and land a low kick you can effectively buckle his leg in a single kick with some luck. Ernesto Hoost's second meeting with Bob Sapp will show you how to utilize this tactic effectively.

Important points:

- Ensure that the opponent CANNOT - not will not but CANNOT - lift his leg to check your kick. Throw a combination or catch him stepping forward.
- Turn your hip all the way over.

Elementary Striking

- Kick slightly upward from inside the leg, and downward from the outside.
- Recover quickly from your kick, because your opponent is likely to come back swinging.
- Keep your elbow across your face. This will defend against punches, and can hurt a careless opponent's hands.

Elementary Striking



White forces Black to cover up with a hard left jab and right straight, before throwing a left hook and simultaneously stepping his left foot out to set up the low kick. White kicks immediately after he lands the hook on Black's guard, ensuring that Black's feet are planted.

The Cross Counter

The Cross Counter or just “The Cross” is one of the most powerful techniques in the arsenal of any fighter who has been trained to use it. It is a simple movement, but the timing and context are what make the difference between a flailing overhand and a true cross counter. Put simply, the cross counter is a right hook combined with a dip of the head to one's left, intended to travel over an opponent's lunging jab. This technique has existed since the late 1800s, and was made into an art form by the great Joe Gans. Later, Joe Louis had enormous success by pressuring his opponents into jabbing while circling into his right hand, then connecting a cross counter and knocking them unconscious.

As already stated, this punch is more an application of anticipation and timing than it is a mechanically difficult technique. The mechanics are fairly basic; practice throwing a right hook, but dipping your left shoulder as you do. This should take your head off line to the left. When your opponent jabs, you want it to travel between your arm and head, just past your right ear. This is the ideal form of the technique, though of course in the heat of battle it is unlikely that you will pull it off perfectly.

The cross counter goes against all your counter-jabbing instincts which you have learned so far. To this end, you are unlikely to learn to use the cross counter instinctively – which is wise, as it takes your head into the path of your opponent's right hand. It should be a calculated move, upon drawing a strong, single jab. This can be done most effectively by raising your hands high, to the outsides of your head, squaring up your shoulders and walking your opponent down after you have established the jab. You can be as good as assured that by blocking his path for roundhouse attacks, and stepping inside of kicking range, the opponent will throw a straight punch. Normally this will be the jab that you can simply slip inside of and land the cross over the top of. On the rare occasion that it is as right straight, the same counter will work – often even better than the counter of the jab. By walking the opponent down and keeping this counter prepared on a hair trigger, one can land devastating, offensive counters.

For an excellent example of the Cross Counter being utilized in a modern setting I highly recommend watching Alistair Overeem's K-1 career. Overeem's hands were pretty terrible for most of his career but he has since added a beautiful cross counter to his arsenal. His bout with Ben Edwards consists entirely of Overeem countering over the top of Edward's jab over and over again.

Elementary Striking



This is the cross counter, and it is a feat of great timing. As you draw your opponents jab, lunge in at forty five degrees to your left with your lead foot, duck your head to that side and connect a right hook over the top. It is important to keep your left hand high so that you will not suffer should the counter prove ineffectual. Black is connecting on White's jaw, but a better target is the temple.

Countering the Counter Fighter

Known as “drawing a counter,” this is the concept of leading with the aim of provoking a predictable counter blow from the opponent, which you in turn will then counter. It is an advanced strategy, but you must have some understanding of it to be successful. There are a great many ways of executing this strategy and high level boxing is full of such techniques. By contrast, in kickboxing and MMA it is much rarer, with only a few fighters such as Giorgio Petrosyan and Anderson Silva doing so at a high level.

Drawing a counter is most commonly done off of the jab, but there is also a great deal to be said about countering off of the right hand. Other techniques may also be used for drawing a predictable counter, such as the teep or a leaping hook or uppercut (as Roy Jones Jr. did so effectively). We shall only deal with a few specific examples here but I encourage the reader to learn from those who seamlessly blend offense and counters. Try to spot fighters who draw the counter effectively, and study video of their approaches. Think about the most frequent responses you see from your own opponents, and how you might exploit them. I intend to explore the huge realm of possible techniques in much more detail, but the basics of applying the principles are laid out here.

Drawing Jab

The drawing jab is an excellent way to convince the opponent to throw back at you. By throwing the jab very side-on, one can make it hard to land a direct counter such as a dipping jab or cross counter. By throwing a couple of long, side on jabs at the opponent's defences rather than at a legitimate target, it is easy to draw a punch following your jab while maintaining a relatively safe distance. Two variations of counter following the long jab are laid out below.

Long Jab to Dip to Right Hand

This technique was a signature of Joe Louis and is completely cohesive with the Blackburn Crouch. After stepping in with a non-committal jab while only slightly dipping, take a deeper dip and bend at the knees to avoid the opponent's return (almost always a jab) which will sail over your left shoulder. By dipping past the opponent's left shoulder it is also extremely difficult for the opponent to follow up with a right hand. As the opponent draws back their attack, lunge on to the front foot and score a clean right straight.

Louis often drew up his right foot as he threw his right hand to close the distance, so that he could continue throwing his powerful hooks at closer range. This is worth practising, but in order to avoid being tied up it is important to practice maintaining the distance as well.

Elementary Striking



Black steps in with a jab, and as soon as his lead foot lands he drops into a low crouch with his head off to the right – this is a pre-emptive defence to White's counter attack and should not be assumed only when an attack is forthcoming. Whether White counters or not, Black immediately returns to an upright stance with a hard right straight.

Long Jab to Cross Counter

This technique was a favourite of Teofilo Stevenson – the great Cuban Olympic boxer. While simple on paper, this technique takes a great deal of practice to implement to its full potential. Initiating the exchange with a long jab (occasionally it is necessary to double jab), step outward with the lead foot as the opponent begins to fire back, and throw a dipping right hook. This will either become a Cross Counter over his jab or a direct counter to his right straight. Either way the opponent will not enjoy the exchange.

Elementary Striking



Black steps in with a side on jab to bait a counter and immediately steps out to land a cross counter as White retaliates. As with the previous move, do not wait for White's retaliation – it is pretty much assured against a good striker, simply move through the motions without hesitation.

Teep to Cross Counter

This works in a similar way to the previous technique. An aggressive puncher will normally step in more aggressively when he has been push kicked away. A cross counter or dipping jab can work excellently off of the teep.

Elementary Striking

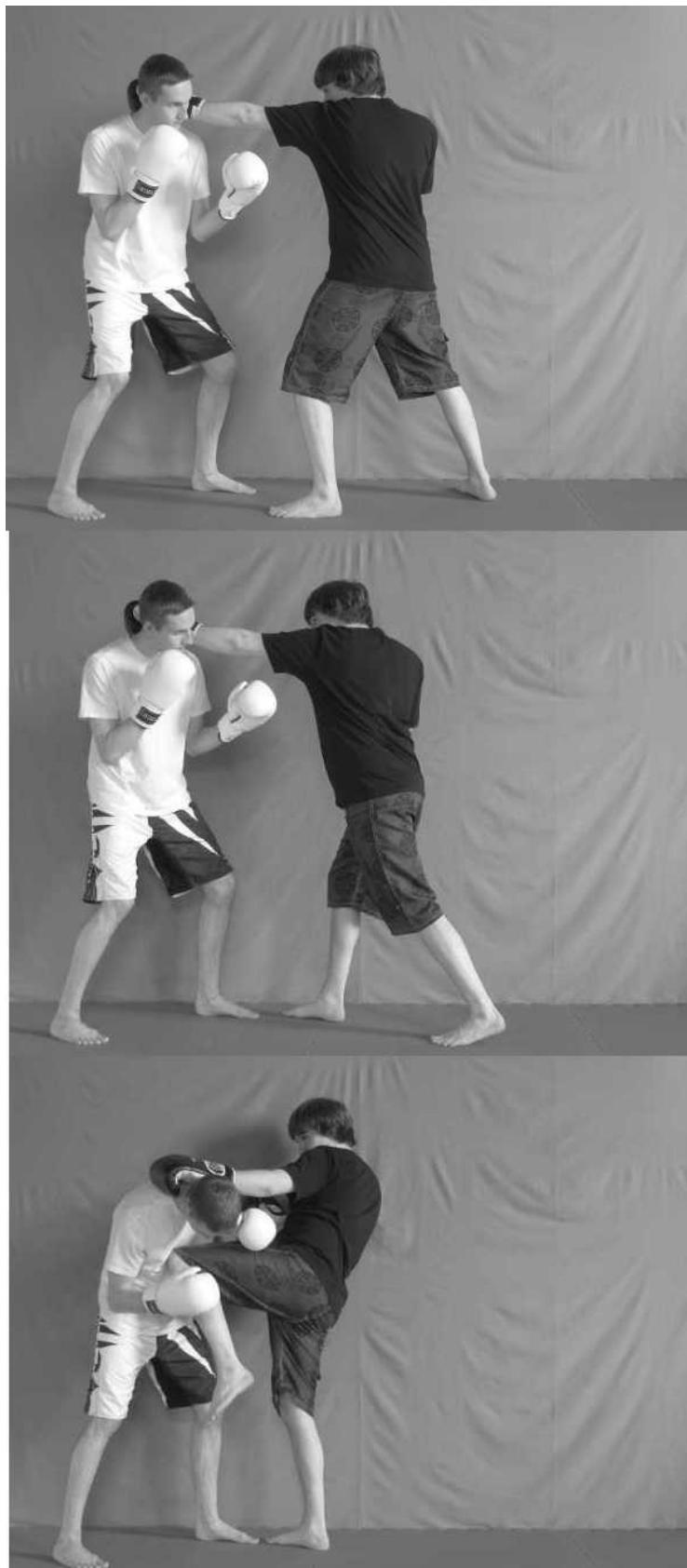


White pushes Black back with a teep to the abdomen. After several teeps Black begins to overcommit and White connects a beautiful dipping cross counter as Black lunges in. This technique will again work in response to almost any punch Black throws.

Jab to knee

A favourite of Buakaw Por Pramuk – the hand should be continually pressed into the opponent's face until he attempts to push past it – at which point a step up knee may be delivered.

Elementary Striking



Against an opponent who slips the jab every time it is thrown, bring your forearm down on the back of his neck, step up and knee.

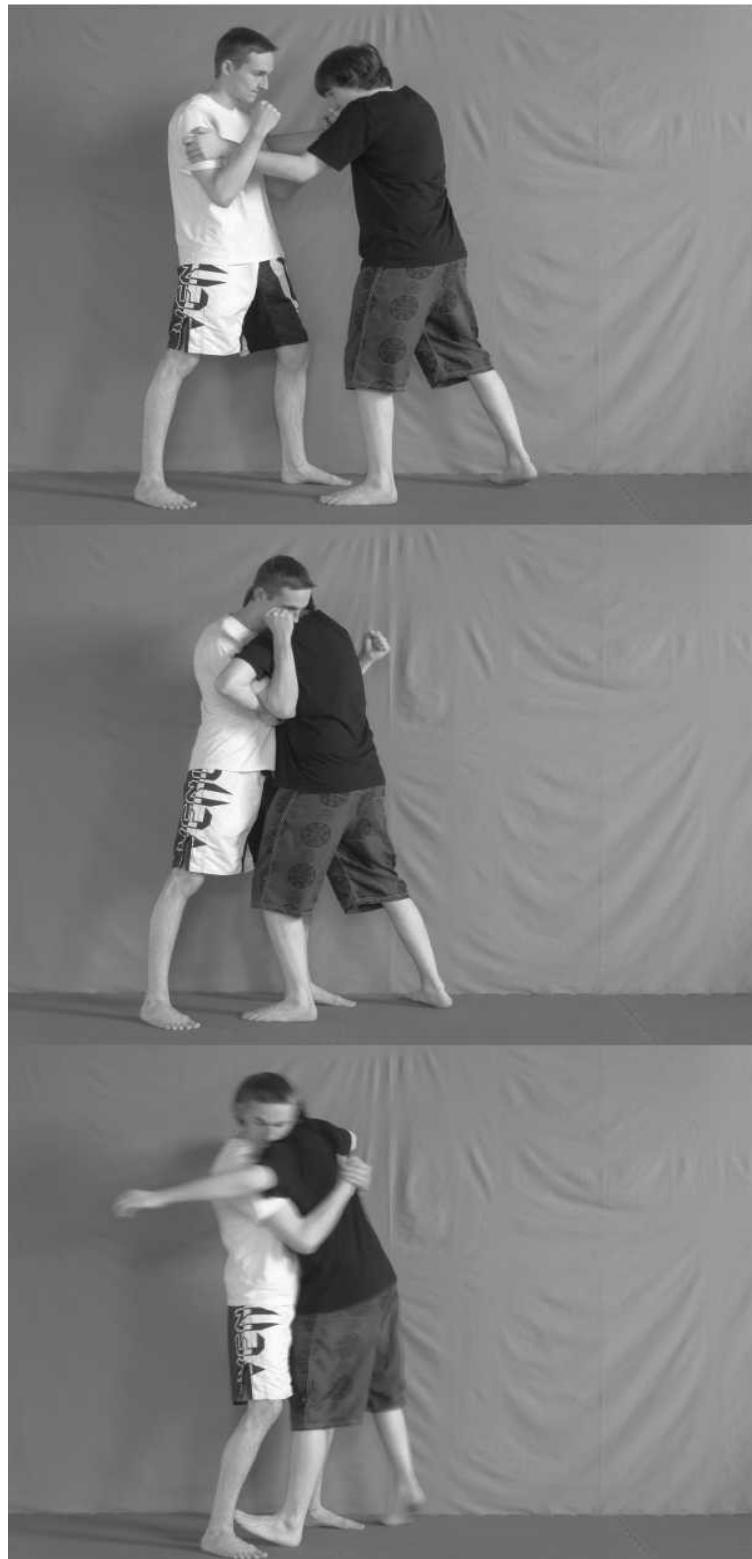
Clinches

The importance of tying up can never be underestimated; a great many top level boxers and kickboxers still seem lost when they are hurt. The difference between a savvy fighter and an ordinary fighter is that the savvy fighter is so practiced at smothering his opponent's movement that he can do it whilst he is hurt and desperate. The techniques outlined in this section are not only useful to mixed martial arts practitioners, but to boxers and in self-defence situations. An umbrella won't keep you completely dry in a storm, and a good guard and blocks do nothing to stop a whirling dervish from an adversary. Clinching is the only action (short of tackling the opponent to the floor) that actively smothers all of an opponent's strikes, and as such should not only be seen as a desperation move, but a way in which to stifle the opponent and to change up one's own defence.

Double Overhooks

Only really applicable to boxing or in desperation during a self-defence scenario, the double overhooks is an extremely limited clinch but one which should be learned anyway. By wrapping over both of the opponent's arms it is possible to completely prevent them from punching effectively but in Muay Thai or MMA the opponent's legs are still free to strike with, and they now have control over your weight and positioning.

Elementary Striking



Black swims his hands inside of White's forearms, reaching over and wrapping them into his armpits. The dangers of this clinch are demonstrated in the bottom frame as White picks Black up with a bodylock.

Over-Under – The Classical Tie Up

The middle ground of strike-prevention and grappling control is the over-under. This position overhooks one arm, preventing it from striking, and gives control over the opponent's weight with an underhook on the other side. To assume the over-under position, either slip inside of a punch and grab under the armpit of the extended arm, or block and overhook a hooking punch.

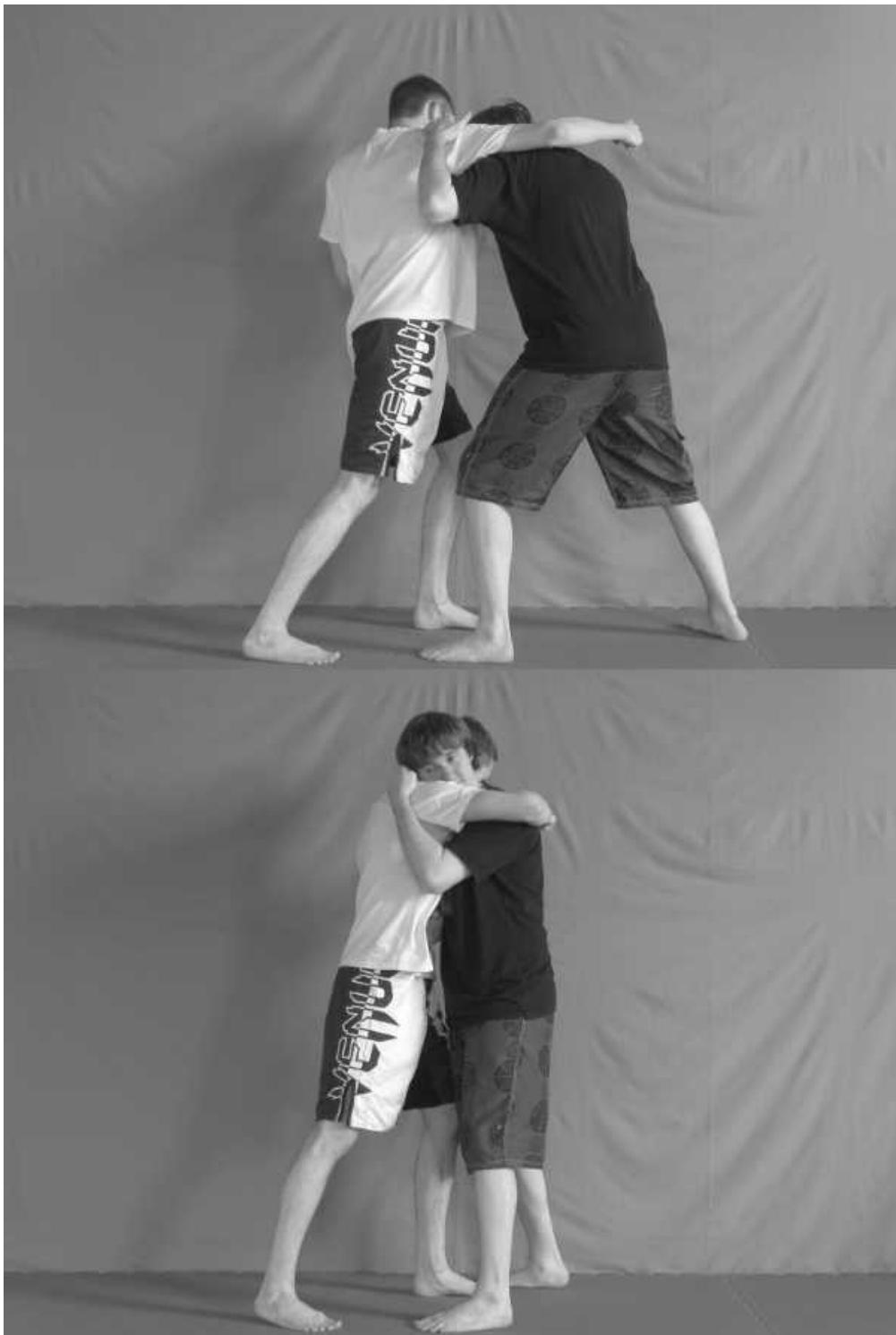
If you assume an underhook on an opponent you can be pretty much assured that they will take one on the opposite side. If you take an overhook on an opponent's punching arm it is important to keep bicep control on the other arm, limiting the opponent's punching ability and looking for another underhook while working with knee strikes.

Elementary Striking



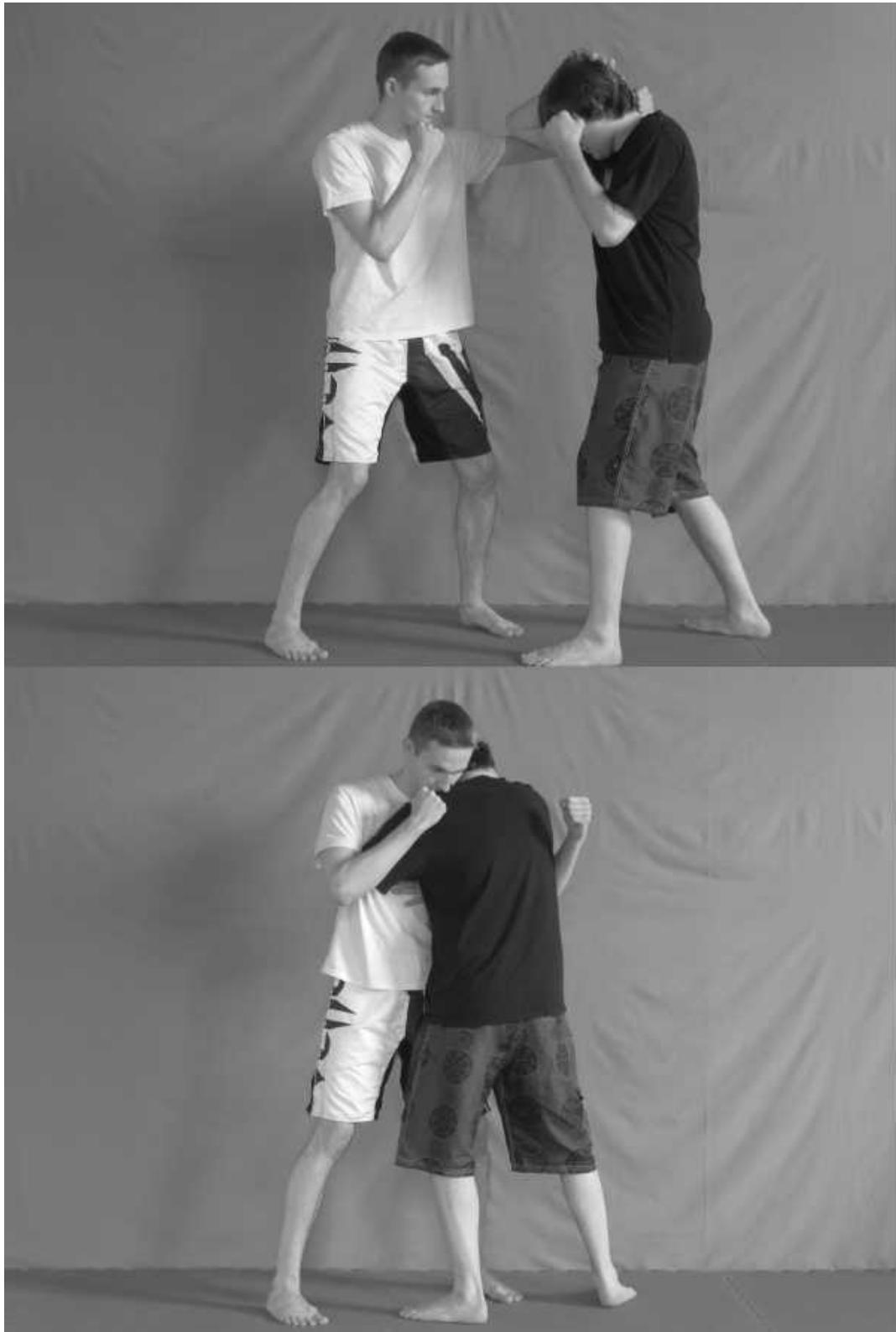
Black blocks inside of White's right punch, wraps over it with his left arm, then dives his right arm underneath White's left armpit. Keeping his left hand pinched between White's chest and his own, Black has now assumed a classical tie-up.

Elementary Striking



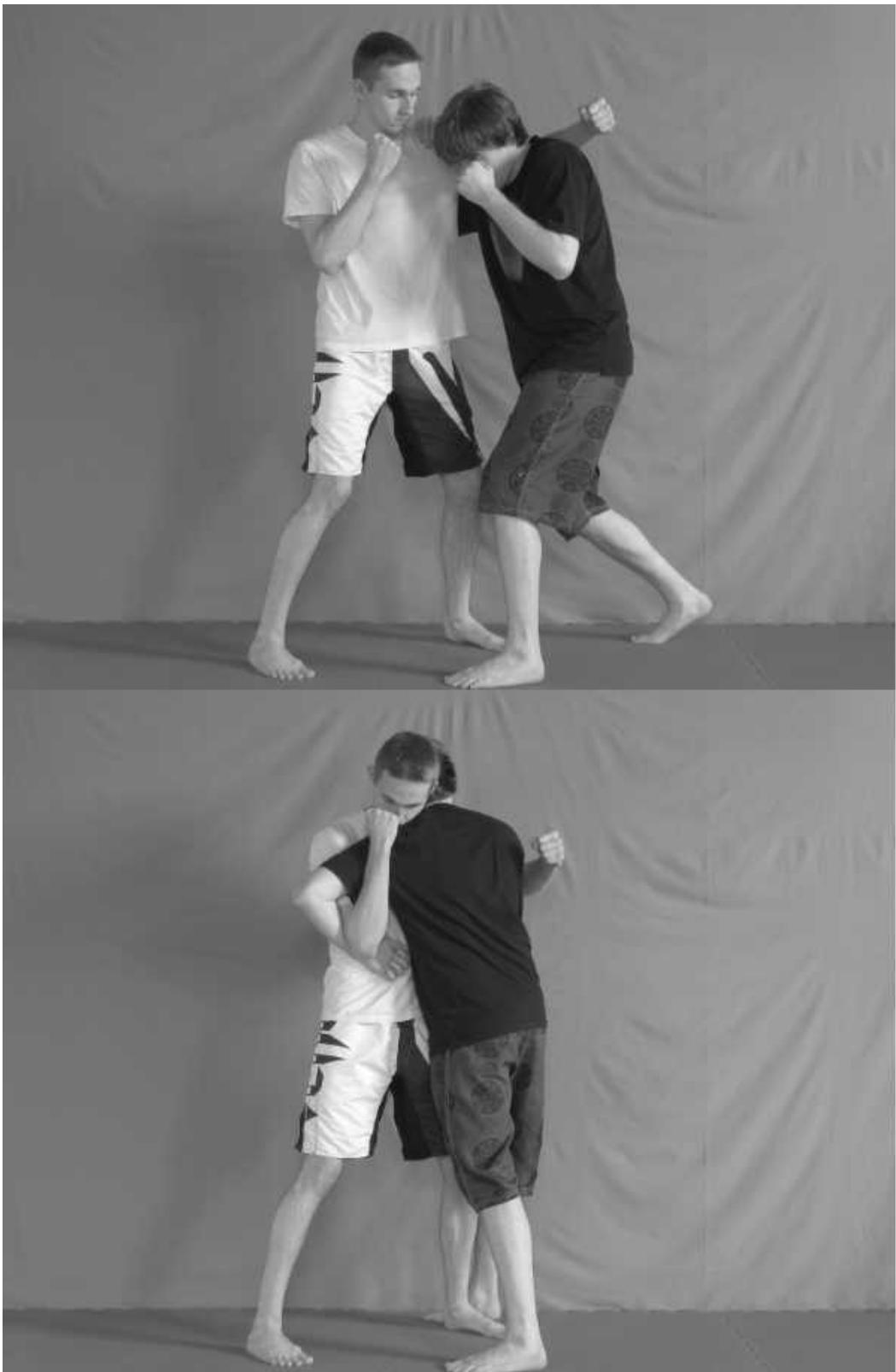
*An alternative clinch against the right hand: Black slips **inside** the punch, then underhooks it. Black then wraps over White's other arm to assume the classical tie up.*

Elementary Striking



Against a left hook Black blocks inside, overhooks it and underhooks White's right armpit.

Elementary Striking



*Alternatively Black slips **inside** the left hook and underhooks it, assuming an overhook on the other side to assume the classical tie up.*

Collar Ties

Exceptionally useful for what is termed “dirty boxing” in MMA, “infighting” during the golden age of boxing, and clinchwork in kickboxing and Muay Thai. Many fighters have found great success by roughing their opponents up in clinches and giving the opponent no time in which to rest. A simple rule for hand position is that when using one hand to hold and the other to strike it is better to hold the neck rather than the base of the skull for reasons of stability. When a double collar tie (with both hands) can be applied, it should be shifted up to the back of the head, then – with the forearms braced against the opponent's collar bones – a double wrist curl will force the opponent's neck to flex, allowing you to pull their head forward and place their crown on your sternum, in prime position for knees.

Elementary Striking



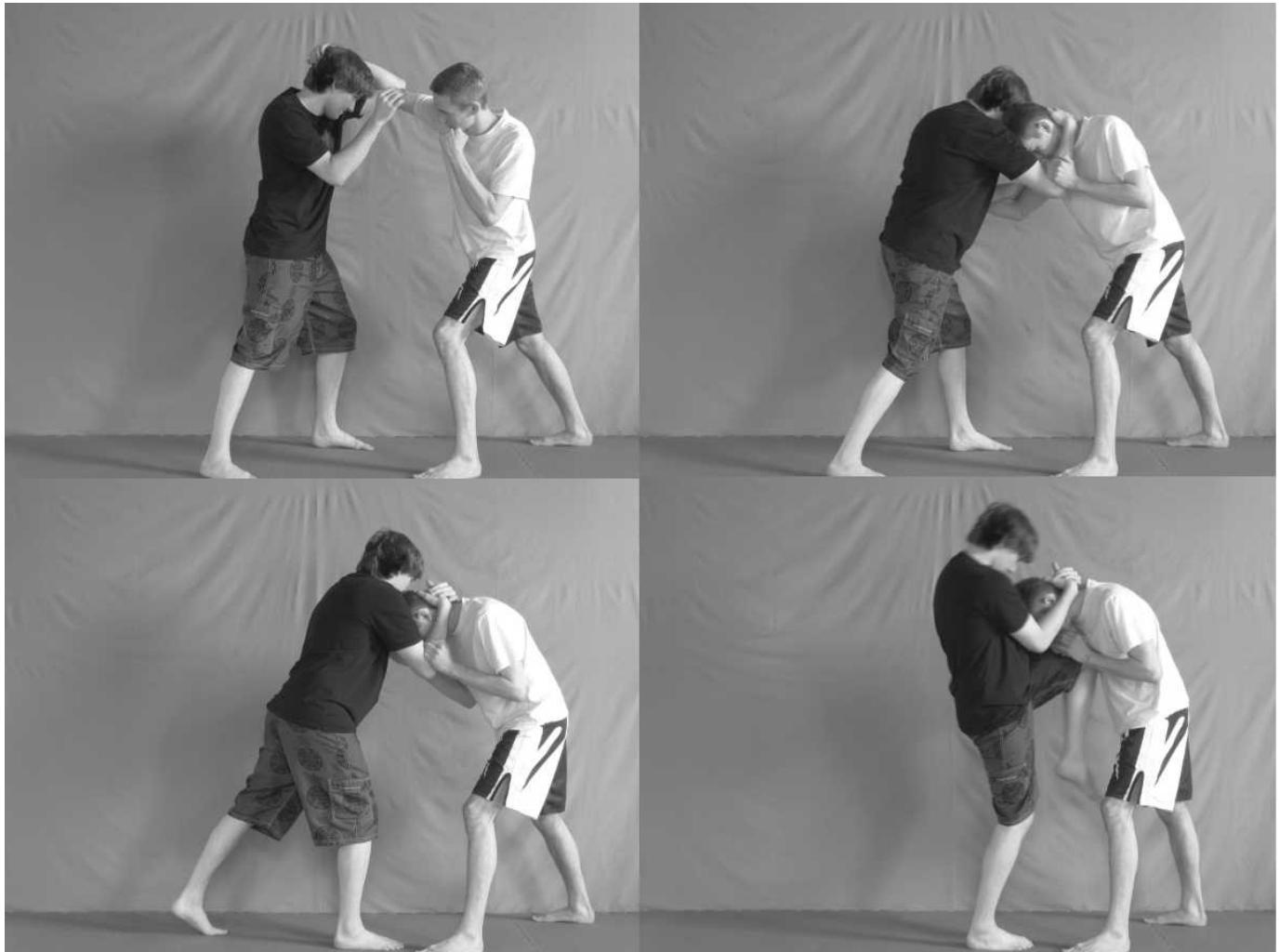
A single collar tie is held on the back of the neck for control.

Elementary Striking



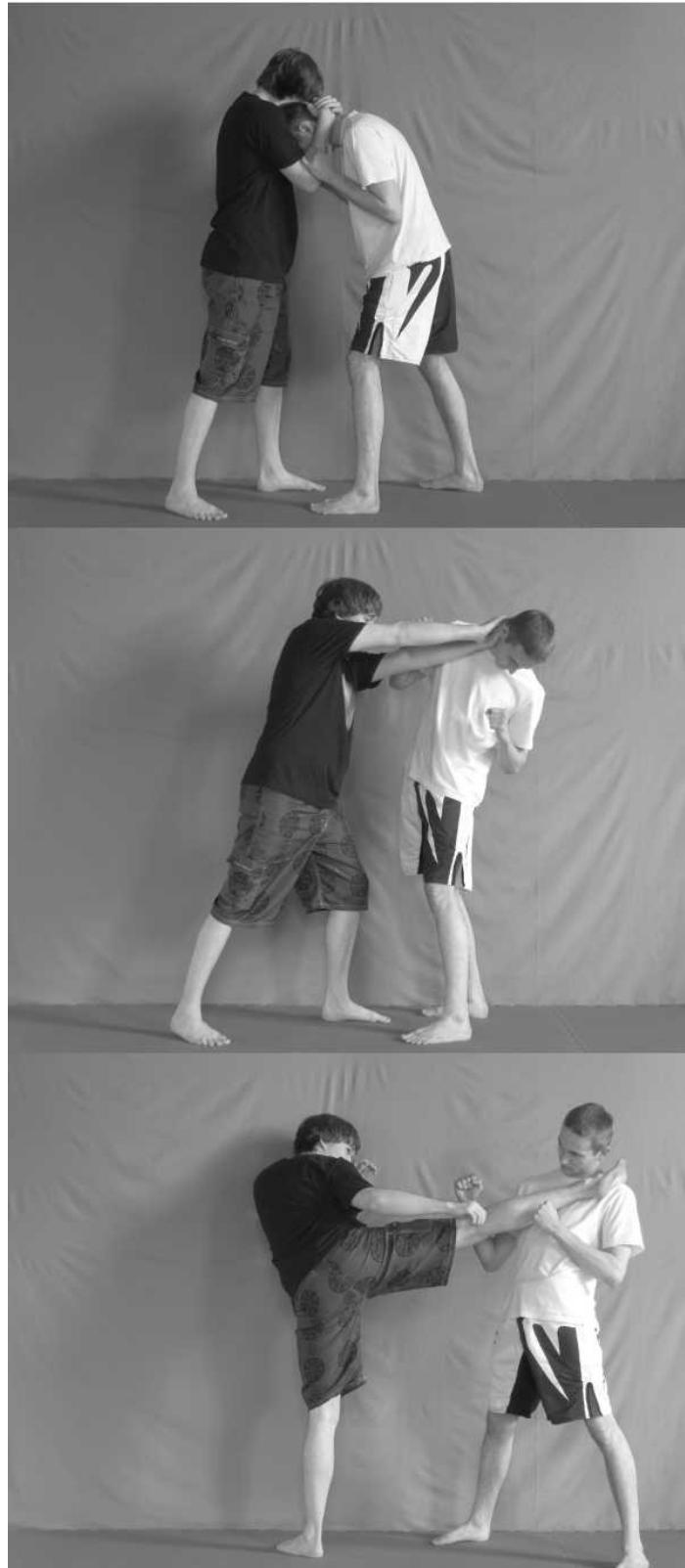
A double collar tie is held on the back of the skull for ability to crumple the opponent's posture.

Elementary Striking



Here Black blocks inside of a wide punch and uses his other hand to assume control of White's neck. Black brings his left hand behind White's head as well (bottom left frame) and switches his feet so that his left leg is far behind him and he is placing a great deal of pressure on White's posture. From here Black connects a knee strike.

Elementary Striking



Often the double collar tie is best used to off balance the opponent for strikes. Here Black pushes White away and as White's hands come down for balance Black connects a high kick to the neck.

Biceps Control

While not strictly a clinch technique this is an effective technique to control the swings of an aggressive opponent or prevent them from clinching you.



White controls both of Black's arms over the biceps, preventing Black from clinching and from striking.

Elementary Striking



Another example of a bicep tie, here used in combination with a single collar tie.

Elementary Striking



The biceps tie makes excellent space to connect a knee to the floating ribs.

Bodylocks

Achieving bodylocks (both arms locked around an opponent, under their arms) is a valuable goal in MMA and is also useful in other combative sports. The bodylock or “double underhooks” gives you maximum control over the opponent’s posture – allowing you to throw, trip or shuck him off to continue the assault at your own discretion. Standing still with a body lock, however, will allow the opponent to land slapping punches to your head and kidneys which – while unlikely to change the course of a fight – are not pleasant.



Punch and Clutch

As much as everyone likes to talk about throwing punches in bunches, and sticking the jab, sometimes it is simply fun to lead with a power punch and NOT worry about closing the door with a jab or anticipating a return and responding with the appropriate weave, block or slip. Under these circumstances it is a great idea to utilize punch and clutch.

Punch and clutch, unlike other offences, works best when you *don't* lead with a jab. So practice throwing a right straight, left hook or overhand, right out of your stance. The speed isn't hugely important to you not getting hit, but cutting down on telegraphing will give you a better chance of landing clean and hurting your opponent.

The Right Hand Lead

There are two nice variations of punch and clutch that are useful to apply off of the right hand lead.

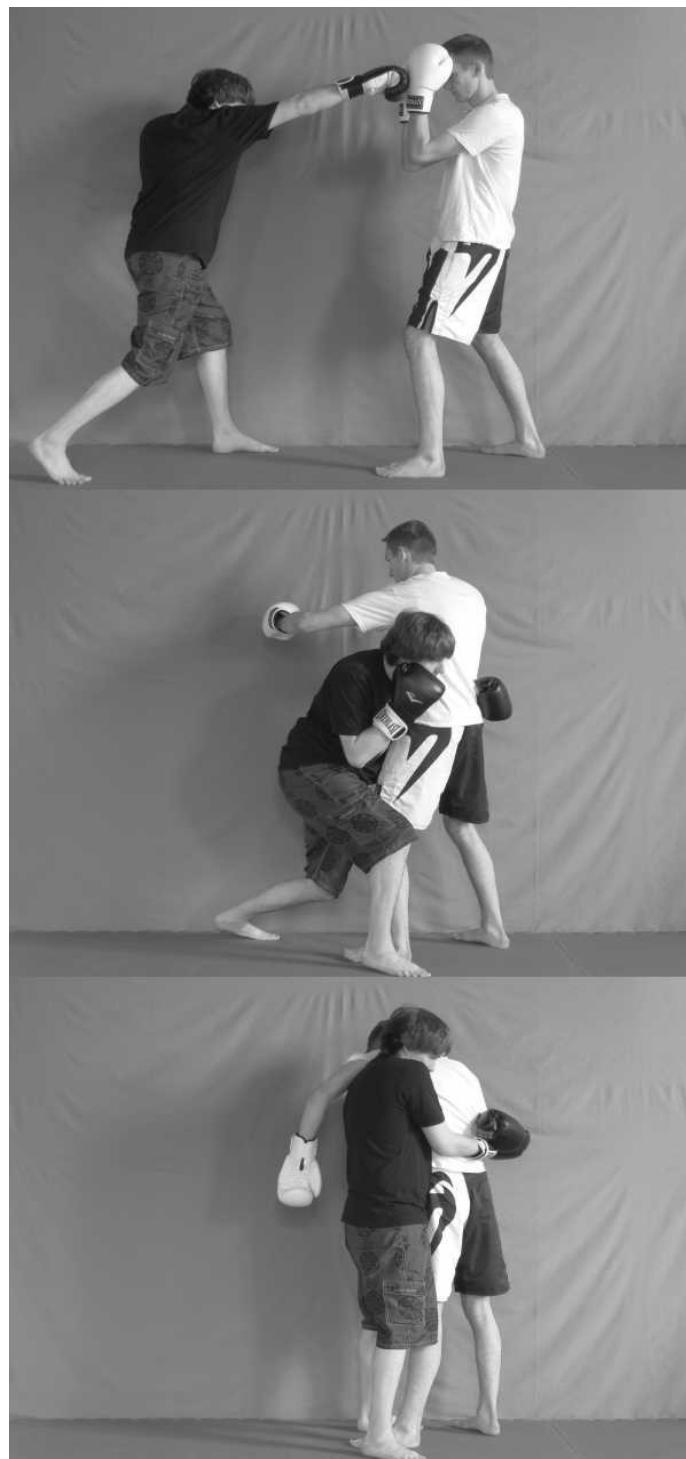
The first is to slip to the left as you throw the right hand, then drop the punch after completion and underhook the opponent's left armpit, coming up chest-to-chest with the opponent, preventing a response. This variation has been used effectively by Floyd Mayweather numerous times, particularly in his fight with Ricky Hatton.

The second is to throw the right hand and *immediately* weave out to the right with a duck of the head. Your opponent will likely counter with a left hook, or will be flailing his arms because he has just been hit with an unexpected power punch. Either way you can weave under his armpit and come up underneath, off-balancing him for further punches or a takedown. Fedor Emelianenko utilized this technique with startling frequency and efficiency.

Important points

- Commit to the technique and try to throw the punch, and get chest-to-chest, in the shortest time possible.
- Commit to the punch. It's a free hit so make it count. You might not be allowed to again.
- Don't linger. This cannot be stressed enough. If you linger between punch and clutch you defeat the point of the technique by allowing the opponent time and space in which to counter.

Right Hand Lead to Weave



Black throws a right hand lead which either connects or is blocked, and ducks as White fires back. Black weaves his head in under White's left armpit, then stands up with a bodylock.

Right Hand Lead to Underhook



Black connects a right hand lead while moving his head to the left.

Elementary Striking



Black dives his right hand under White's left armpit and drives in to collide chest-to-chest.

Angles

The heart of technical striking is the concept of working from angles. “Angles” is a term that is often used but little understood within the combat sports world. In a fight an angle, typically, is a dominant position – somewhere from which you can strike your opponent much more easily than he can strike you. Angles work for the simple reason that any fighter's defence is set up entirely to deal with an opponent who is directly in front of him. By stepping off of the 12 o'clock position in the opponent's vision you can make your attacks land much more easily.

Taking an angle on the opponent is not something that will happen often – few opponents will let you get to a dominant position – but the simple act of pivoting to face you will remove power from their punches and strength from their defences for a moment – and this is also a prime time to attack. Below a few basic methods of taking an angle from which to strike are described.

Sidestep Counter

One basic way to take a dominant angle is to sidestep an opponent's attack, moving to another angle in the process and setting up a counter attack. Against opponents who are prone to dive in with flurries a long step may be taken to evade their rushes and a major angle taken. Against a methodical fighter who stays on balance a rapid sidestep and counter must be executed in one motion. You cannot afford to sidestep *then* decide what to throw. Simply sidestep and spring back with the outside hand.

Elementary Striking

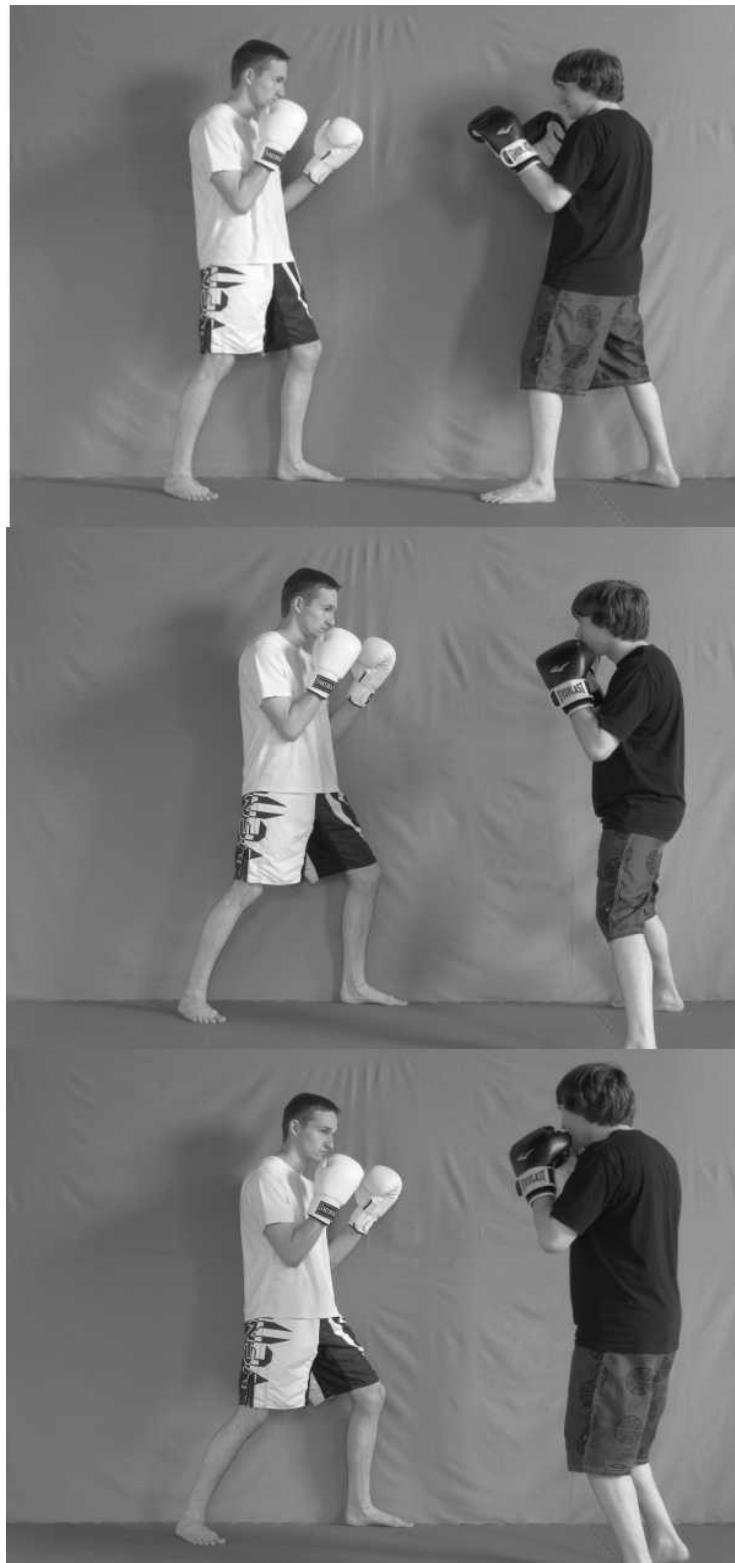


As Black lunges at White, White performs a Classical Side Step and moves to an angle. From here White can connect his right straight or hook with little difficulty or threat of retaliation.

Pep Step

An excellent technique for **outpointing** an opponent – this offensive manoeuvre relies on baiting the opponent to chase you. It was with this technique almost exclusively that Willie Pep established himself as one of the greatest defensive boxers of all time. From the standard stance bring the lead foot back to level with the right and begin circling to your lead side with side steps. The opponent will be forced to adjust direction and will try to close the distance opened by your step back. As he moves to face you, step your opposite leg (the one that was to the rear in your stance) outside of his lead foot and dive in with a powerful left straight to the head or body.

Elementary Striking



Black draws his left leg back level to his right, then steps out to the side and begins skipping around to his left.

Elementary Striking

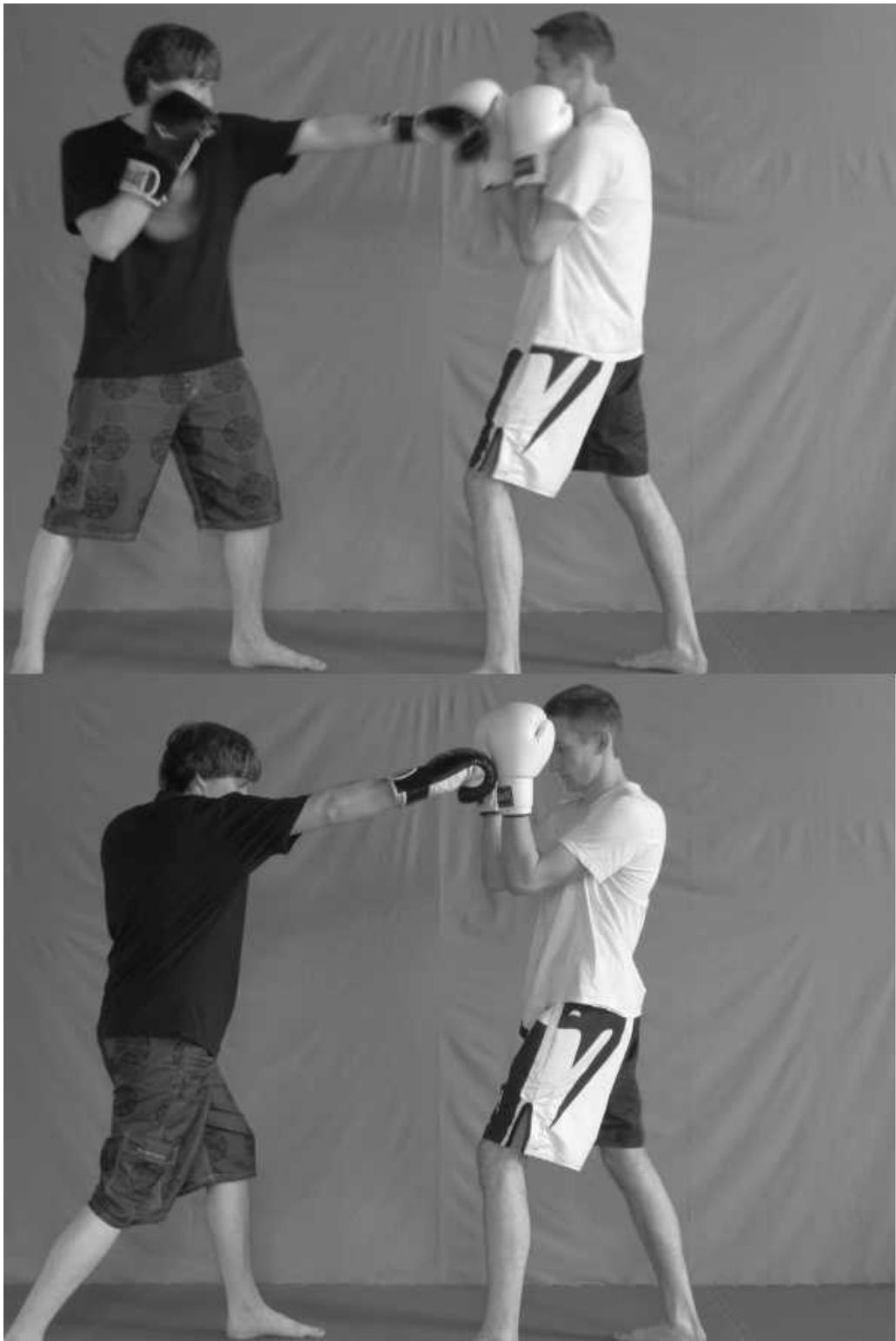


As White pivots to face Black, Black steps forward with his right foot outside of White's left and lands a hard left straight.

Angling off of the Right Hand

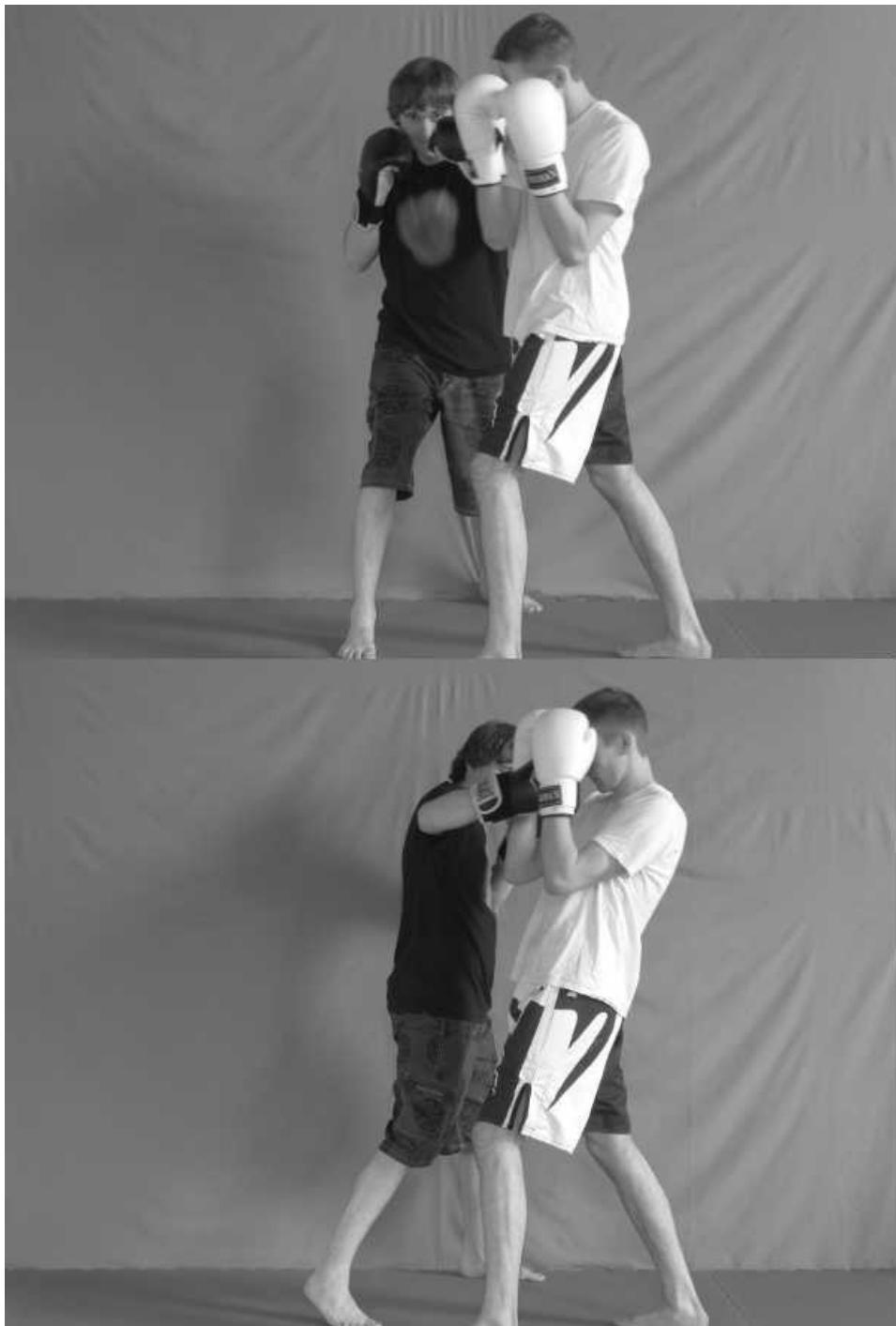
A favourite of myself and my students, this move has also been utilized successfully by Nonito Donaire, Eddie Alvarez and Mike Tyson – showing how well it can be utilized in a remarkably diverse range of styles. To perform this technique, after throwing your right hand simply skip up to your left side in a southpaw stance. From here you can throw a right hook as Tyson loved to, throw a combination, or throw a left straight and angle off exactly the same way in the opposite direction as Nonito Donaire loves to do (though this will take a great deal of practice!).

Elementary Striking



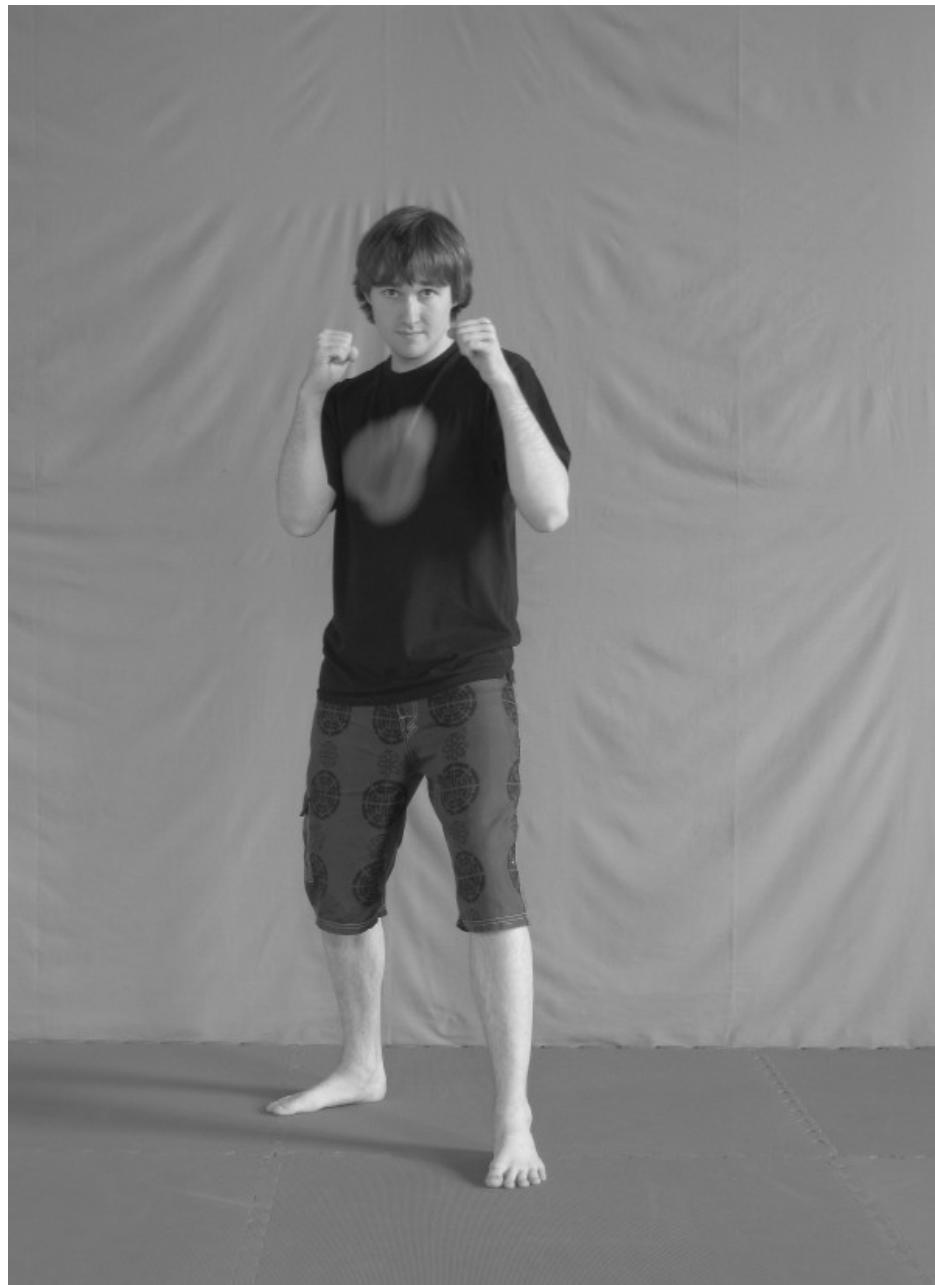
Black opens with a hard 1 – 2 against White's defences.

Elementary Striking



Black hops his right foot up to replace his left and kicks his left out behind him into a southpaw stance facing the opponent from the side. From here he can land easily with right hooks and left straights.

The Angling Motion in Isolation



Black stands in stance.

Elementary Striking



Black draws his right foot up to his left.

Elementary Striking

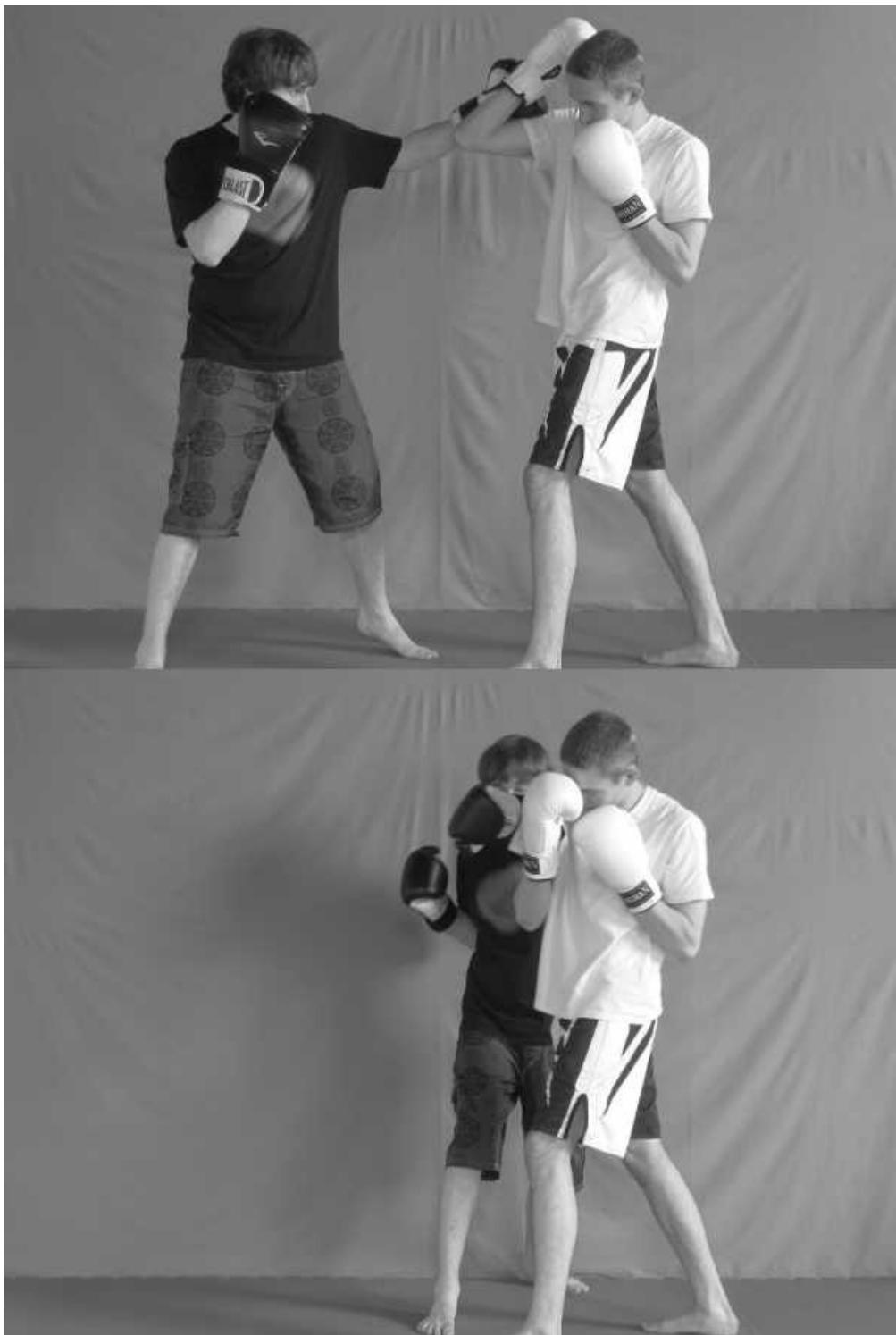


Black kicks his left leg out behind him as he turns towards his right, landing in a southpaw stance.

Angling off of the Left Hook

This technique is useful against an opponent who is more apt to block punches than to evade them. To take advantage of this, force the opponent to block a long left hook, pushing him to your right side as you perform the same skip as in the last technique, to your left. Finish with a hard right hook to his face and follow up as you please.

Elementary Striking



Black lands a left hook, then performs the same hop step featured in the previous technique. This technique is better for slower fighters as the left hook can be used against the opponent's guard to off-balance him in the opposite direction to your intended hop.

Side Stepping off of the Right Hook

The right hook can be applied in exactly the same way with a classical side step to the right. This technique has been used successfully by Wladimir Klitschko in order to break up the predictability of the 1 – 2.

Elementary Striking



White forces Black to block a right hook, then executes a classical sidestep to the right, before coming back with the right hook to the body – though a straight to the head would work just as well. It is important that you strike the opponent's guard with force on the first punch to set his weight as you move around him.

Sidestepping off of the Left Hook

This technique is a beautiful way to exit an exchange and punish an over-aggressive opponent. Once you have engaged with a right hand, and the opponent is either defending or firing back, step out to your right with your right foot, simultaneously driving through with a left hook as you push off of your left leg. Keep the right forearm elevated to block a counter left hook, but in the event of a jab or any form of right hand punch, you are likely to counter your opponent's strike. Throw this hook higher than usual, aiming to cross over the opponent's right hand and connect on their temple.

Elementary Striking



Black begins in stance.

Elementary Striking



Black steps out to the right with his right foot, simultaneously throwing a left hook as he drives off of his left leg. Because he is moving his entire weight in the same direction as the punch, this is one of the purest left hooks he can throw.

Elementary Striking



Black brings his left foot up and turns to face his opponent.

Elementary Striking



White is in the middle of an exchange, landing his right straight and expecting an immediate retaliation.

Elementary Striking



As the retaliation comes, White steps off-line to his right and lands his left hook over the top of Black's right hand.

Notes from the Author



A Note From Jack Slack:

Some days you will be the pigeon and some days you will be the statue.

In the course of learning the striking arts you will get hit and hurt, scratched and bruised. Grin and take it but never resign yourself to it.

Improvement in the martial arts, whether they be traditional or modern, comes the same way to everyone whether they be Anderson Silva or Joe Bloggs – by making slight improvements through recognising mistakes.

Work out what you did wrong, make a note of it and *change it*.

If you can get into this habit, you can try to avoid making the same mistake twice. At this point every mistake you make in training just tightens up your game a bit more.

Advanced Striking

If you wish to learn more about the beautiful striking martial arts I highly recommend picking up my first book – Advanced Striking. Advanced Striking is a book that examines the techniques of 20 of the world's best strikers.

Over 70 techniques from the arsenals of boxing legends, kickboxing greats and UFC champions are presented in this one of a kind book. Pick it up from www.FightsGoneBy.com

Advanced Striking:
Tactics of Boxing, Kickboxing and MMA Masters



By Jack Slack

Elementary Striking

Jack Slack is available for coaching, advice and seminars around the world.

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